







Odette Taylor
#2



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BOSS

BY

ODETTE TYLER

Mrs. Elizabeth
Lae (Kirkland)
who played

Woman's honor is nice as ermine—
will not bear a soil.—DRYDEN.



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PREFACE.

THE story of "Boss" is a photograph taken from the memory of those who were members of the household and witnesses of the events described, and is true in all essential features, except that fictitious names of persons and places are substituted in the narrative for the real ones.

I have endeavored to give the story its appropriate setting, describing the region in which the incidents transpired, interspersing them with the folk-lore, the jests, the anecdotes, and the local expressions which gave color to the daily life of the people of that neighborhood.

The sacrifices which they made on the altar of their divinity, Honor, may seem exaggerated to those removed by time and distance from the scene. They were true, nevertheless, and those who refused to worship at that shrine could not wear the badge of the "F. F. V." in the halcyon days of the Old Dominion.

ODETTE TYLER.

NEW YORK, 1895.

BOSS.

CHAPTER I.

"TIDDY BOY ! Tiddy Boy ! You dawg you ! why don' you an'ser ? Fo' Gord, I lif' yo' by yo' leg an' beat yo' brains out."

"Heah ez me."

"Ez yo' comin' ?"

"I ez."

"Tote yo' feet quicker ! Ez yo' comin' ? I jes' ax yo'—ez yo' ?"

"Heah ez me, I tell yo' ; heah ez me. Cindy, yo' ez mon'sus onreasonable nohow. How yo' specks me to clean de Cun'l's—"

"Hush yo' mouf, yo' nigger—dat's de on'yolest excuse yo' got ! De Boss want her haws Sweetbrier ; she say she ez de freshest dis mornin'. Name o' Gord, I nuver see sich a man ! She don' tole yo' las' nite she want 'er early in de mornin',

an' heah yo' ez, stanin' axin' mo' questions. O Lordy, dyah ez de Boss now ! Yo' better hump yo'sef, nigger. He ! he ! He don' run all de way to de stable wid he haid down."

"What's the joke, Mammy?" asked the Boss; "you're scolding Uncle Rufus again."

"Gord, honey, dat ez de fust time I see dat nigger run sence de wa'. He ! he ! It sut'n'y am cu'yus how mons'us lazy dat man ez. Whew ! I laf' so, meh haid feels like it 'a' tryin' to bus'."

Mammy stood holding her sides, panting for breath. Though she still retained a large muscular frame, seventy years had furrowed her black face. A cheerful disposition and plenty of good food, however, had served to keep away many other evidences of old age. A red bandanna crowned her ebony forehead, and imparted an air of dignity to her countenance; while her great black eyes beamed with honesty, and between her red lips could be seen two sets of white teeth. She had a "tol'rance for her 'ole man, Tiddy Boy," but she adored "Little Missy," the Boss.

"Hain't I don' brung de chile up? Hain't

I nuss her at meh own bres'—she an' Cerity? An' hain't hit look like I don' give de bes' milk to little Missy, fur she was straight like a baccy-plant, while Cerity wuz crooked an' ailin'. Hain't I dress her fur her fust party, an' fix her hyah mehse'f? Her hayh dat look like bronze boots, when de sun shine on 'em. An' when she wuz all th'o' an' stood dar, lookin' sweet as candy, didn' she put dat little red mouf of hurn, dat had sich a queer way of curlin' up at de corners, to her Mammy's black face, an' kiss her onst, an' den kiss her agin? An' who wuz hit dat teach her to sing dem nigger songs? Why, yer black Mammy, ob cose."

She was careful never to say anything of the long lessons in swimming and whistling, with Uncle Rufus as teacher—lessons given until the Boss could outstroke the old man, and outwhistle a flageolet.

Mammy considered such accomplishments "onnecessary," and many was the jawing Uncle Rufus got for "puttin' sich onery notions in de chile's haid."

Nevertheless, the Boss grew up tall and straight, with white skin and gray eyes, shaded by dark, thick lashes. She danced like a Frenchwoman, rode like an Indian,

and was as much at home in the river as on the lawn. At every ball, skating tournament and fox-hunt, the Boss was the acknowledged leader.

"Is it long before breakfast, Mammy?" asked the Boss.

"Mos' two hours, honey; I'll git yo' a snack."

"Do; I am full of emptiness. Hurry up, Mam; yonder comes Sweetbrier."

The black woman glanced over her shoulder and grinned satirically.

"Um—m, dat nigger he ain' 'sturbed dis mawnin'—no, indeedy."

The girl placed one of her little brown hands, which terminated in oval pink nails, against Mammy's rough cheek.

"You worship Uncle Rufus—you know you do. When he had the fever, you would not let even Cerity wait on him," the Boss laughed wickedly.

The negress drew herself up to her huge proportions, and replied: "Go-long, chile! I jes' tolerates him—dat's all; jes' tolerates him," and then glided through the baize door into the pantry. Presently she returned, carrying a tray, which was placed on the top step and the dishes spread out—a bit of Virginia ham, a bowl of clabber, a

cup of yellow cream, and a plate of beaten biscuits.

The Boss watched the old woman with alert, confident eyes.

"That'll do—that's enough. Um—m, Mammy ! it certainly is good," said she, hastily swallowing morsel after morsel with sighs of delight.

The old woman regarded her in dignified silence.

"Don' eat no mo', honey ; yo' won' enjoy yo' break'us when yo' come back. We ez got fried chicken dis mawnin'—an' woffuls."

The Boss shook the crumbs from her lap and slipped her hands into her riding-gloves.

"All right, Uncle Rufus," she called out, "bring — Sweetbrier — here — I'll — mount—from—the—steps.

"Hullo, beauty—steady !"

The mare lowered her handsome head as the Boss felt her way down her cheek and nose, and talked to her in that caressing tone to which a horse is most susceptible.

Sweetbrier was a sorrel thoroughbred, fifteen hands high, and full of fire, but without a superfluous ounce of flesh. Her skin was soft and pliant as a woman's.

"Uncle Rufus, hold your hand. Now, one, two, three—that's it! You've got on the curb. Steady, my beauty; you are feeling fit as a fiddle this morning, aren't you?"

As the Boss galloped down the road she was followed by an army of dogs, swarming helter-skelter over the fences, and joining in one glorious bark as she sang,—

"I went to see Ginny when my work was done,
And she put the hoe cake on, my love;
And Ginny put the hoe cake on,
But Master saunt and called me away,
'Fore Ginny got the hoe cake done, my love—
'Fore Ginny got the hoe cake done."

"I teached her dat," remarked Mammy, with conscious pride.

"Who teached her to sit on her haws like a circus gal? I ax you dat?"

"Um—m, nigger, dat's nuffin' to de way she can sing."

CHAPTER II.

THE Cameron homestead lay on the summit of a hill, which rose suddenly out of broad low lands skirting the river. From the front windows one had an unobstructed view of the James, which wound in and out the valley below like a silver serpent. The river was dotted with tiny islands and checkered with huge rocks rising precipitously from the clear water. On the brows of adjacent hills a number of homesteads displayed gray and dilapidated fronts—sad reminders of the decay of former wealth. Across the river lay Buckingham.

Somebody once facetiously remarked that “like a singed cat, it was better than it looked.”

The dwelling-house and negro quarters were of wood, painted white, with slate roofs and green blinds. To the left of the house was a red brick cottage, thirty by twenty feet, with two apartments—a par-

lor and bedroom. The walls were mantled with Virginia creeper, and around one side ran a small balcony, overlooking a vegetable garden.

The plantation had been the property of the Camerons for three generations. From time to time additions had been made, until now it presented an imposing outlay. The brick cottage was the exclusive property of Lucius Strange. He had built it five years ago, after the death of his father, a friend of the Colonel's youth.

Returning from a trip around the world, which was made after leaving the University, Lucius had taken up his residence with the Camerons. He was the only son of Judge John D. Strange, of Virginia, and from his earliest recollections had been impressed with the fact that he must follow in the footsteps of his ancestors. The sudden death of his father, however, upset all of his plans, and he returned home, after a two years' absence, to content himself with the common-place life of a farmer.

Lucius had inherited the gift of eloquence from his parent, and in all the leagues and clubs was the first to be called upon to address the audience.

Over in the "big house," the family was enlarged by the presence of Bob Schuyler, the orphan son of Colonel Cameron's sister and Gaston Glen Schuyler. Miss Patsy Cameron had been the famous beauty of the family, and had died immediately after the birth of her son. Upon her deathbed, the Colonel had promised that, if he became the father of a girl, the two should be united, thus retaining in the family the Cameron lands. With this assurance her young life had passed away, following the hero husband, who had bravely met his death at Gettysburg.

Colonel Cameron was well over six feet, slender, but superbly proportioned. He was just sixty, with a profusion of bushy white hair, covering his large finely shaped head, which was carried a little to one side. The eyebrows were white and heavy, beneath which gleamed a pair of eyes, full-orbed and piercing as an eagle's. His mouth could be tender and winsome as a woman's, and every movement showed the culture of his character. He despised deception and adored truth. A lie aroused his anger, which was cold and cutting; and he was implacable to those unfortunate enough to merit his disdain.

The Boss drew rein suddenly, as a young man slowly made his way across a tract of stubbly vegetation. He had not heard the approaching beat of the horse's hoofs on the soft earth. His head was down, as, with his whip, he carelessly tapped his boots, red with the dust of a long tramp. Coming nearer to the Boss, he raised his head and looked curiously up at the sun. His face showed a Southern type, decidedly Creole. The forehead was low and broad ; the eyes were large, dark and penetrating, emphasized by broad, black brows, and the mouth was hidden by a heavy moustache. Both in his face and figure, superb health and great physical strength were displayed ; he was tall and supple, and bore the unmistakable evidences of a gentleman.

"Good-morning, Lucius," cried the Boss, her face lighting up and her eyes flashing. "You look as if you were plotting some deadly enterprise. Are you?"

Just then the young man caught sight of the girl on horseback. His face flushed lightly, and he caught his breath as if he had been running fast. Raising his hand, he took off the slouched hat and stood with his handsome head bare.

"Good-morning," he replied simply, as he sprang over the low fence that separated them. "I didn't know you were out. Glorious day, isn't it?"

The Boss pursed up her lips and looked at the immense expanse of blue sky, through which the sun, like a huge ball, was beginning to blaze.

"That depends."

"It's time we planted our corn, for the dogwood is already blossoming," said the man slowly. "We ought to have a fine crop this year. You must have ridden hard. The Brier looks heated."

"I did," said the Boss. "You see," pulling the bridle, "I had them put on the curb. She has a hard mouth. Are you riding?"

The man shook his head. "By the way," he said, "I brought you that book you wanted from Richmond. I read two or three chapters on the train coming over. Didn't think much of it, though, for the girl marries the wrong chap."

The Boss leaned forward in her saddle and flicked a fly off Sweetbrier's ear.

"Is that so strange? I have heard of such things in real life. Haven't you?"

"She spoke quite low, scarcely as if she

intended him to hear, as her eyes followed the jagged ends of the mountains. Suddenly she looked down at him and laughed frankly.

"I bet you began at the end, like the Chinese, and read backwards. You are impetuous, Lucius. Your temperament wants taming. You are always anticipating. Why don't you take Bob as a pattern? He never anticipates or gets nervous. I don't actually believe a bomb could disconcert him. Dear old boy," she concluded tenderly.

The man struck at the air with his whip. "If we are going back for breakfast, I reckon we had better start."

Presently the Boss bent over and touched his shoulder with the tips of her fingers.

"Don't be cross, Lucius," she said. "We haven't so much time together that we can afford to spend it quarrelling. Well, what are you thinking of?" she continued, looking at him sharply.

But the man did not reply.

"Come, won't you tell me?" she asked curiously.

"Yes, if you insist," he replied gravely. "Boss, I was coveting my neighbor's goods."

The girl's face grew hard and white. A deep tone had come into her gray eyes ; it made them look tragic. She tried to laugh, but failed. She steadied herself a moment, for the saddle seemed to be turning. Then she spoke, but her voice was low and hoarse.

“How dare you speak to me so ? You, who pride yourself on your Southern chivalry ! I thought you were his friend. Do you know,” she went on cruelly, “ what Bob ought to do ? He ought to shoot you ! The betrayal of a friend is the act of a coward.”

The man's teeth struck against each other with an odd, dry sound.

“I wish to God he would. Don't—don't say anything more ! Be merciful.”

But he was talking to deaf ears. The Boss had put whip to her horse. For a moment only he saw a firm, resolute figure, erect and as straight as a candle ; then the top of a red hill, far away.

CHAPTER III.

THE next evening the Colonel held a small levee on the broad piazza. One huge glass of "julep" had already found an eloquent obituary; another, filled with long, glistening leaves, rested upon the railing in front of him.

The Boss looked cool and fresh in a dotted Swiss gown, with elbow-sleeves and three tiny bias ruffles on the skirt. She lay indolently back in a low deck-chair.

At the other end of the piazza, with arms folded on the thin rail, and the stem of a dogwood pipe between his lips, lounged Bob Mathews. He was young and good-looking, but extremely languid. A yellow pongee shirt, a pair of white flannel trousers, and a tie, in which glistened a diamond-pin, completed his outfit. For a moment his great blue eyes rested with lazy admiration upon the figure of the girl, whose hair was tipped with gold by the setting sun.

“ Yes, siree ! ” exclaimed the Colonel, in his soft Southern voice. “ Everybody around here was scared sho’ nouf. They thought the end of time had come. It was what they called a meteoric fall ; looked like all the stars in the heavens were dropping. Taylor Gauff’s nigger Tom woke his master up about twelve o’clock, hollerin’, ‘ Massa, Massa ! de judgment-day am come, sho’. Taylor Gauff got up and went to the window and looked out into the darkness. ‘ Go to bed, you damn fool,’ he said. ‘ Who ever heard of the judgment-day in the middle of the night ? ’ Ha—ha, Gauff was a blood, I tell you—he was one of Mosby’s men. I recollect one night I was carrying despatches from General Beauregard to General Johnston to tell him that the Federal army was advancing, when I came upon fifteen guerrillas. I just saluted and passed on, when lo and behold ! yonder came a Yankee colonel, driving an ambulance. He was a Dutchman. I knew those boys would make him hump, so I drew up to watch the fun. Lordy, I never shall forget the scared look on that blue-nosed Yankee, when Gauff drew out a Colt’s navy revolver and held it in front of his face. ‘ None of your

damned tea-table talk,' said he, 'but give me your watch and pocket-book!' By God, sir, those were great days! Yes, siree," the Colonel gazed straight ahead of him, into a past as deep as the valley beyond.

"Po-pa," said the Boss, straightening out her white arms and holding them above her head as rigid as bars of steel, "did you think, when the war began, that we were going to get whipped?"

"I protest," said Bob, yawning; "for the Lord's sake don't unfurl that gory flag. Come, walk, Boss? Down in the summer-house—it's cool."

The girl did not condescend to answer, but only shook her head. "Where is Lucius?" she asked, turning to her father; "I haven't seen him since supper."

"Don't know," the Colonel replied slowly, knitting his brows. "Reckon he's gone to the stables. Something's ailing the boy lately. Last night I heard him thrashing about in his cottage; it must have been nearly two o'clock; then he went out and slammed the door. I don't think he came back until daybreak."

The Boss sat very still; then she threw

her head haphazard against the back of the chair.

Bob gently knocked the ashes from his pipe over the side of the railing.

"He smokes too much strong tobacco ; it's affecting his nerves. I tell you what, Boss," he said, "he oughter fall in love with you for a change. You'd cure him devilish quick ; wouldn't she, Colonel?"

Again that sudden twinge. She had felt it yesterday morning, while talking to Lucius in the road.

Suddenly the Boss jumped up and shook her skirts, then nestled down behind her father's chair. She put her arms around his neck, and pulled his head back against her shoulder. The girl was determined not to think—not even to allow any distinct recollection of yesterday to enter her mind.

"Po-pa," she said, talking hurriedly, as if to dull importunate aches, "tell us some more about the war ; some anecdotes—anything. I want to be amused. It's too warm to think for one's self ; you are always so interesting," she added sweetly.

The Colonel couldn't help smiling. "You are a little flatterer, 'Huckle," he said, "but a mighty sweet one."

Both Bob and the Boss laughed heartily.

"An exchange of artillery, Colonel," said Bob.

The Boss pinched the Colonel's ear. "Now who's the flatterer, Po-pa?" She looked down the path. The gate separating the barnyard from the lawn shut with a distant clang. Her arms instinctively tightened about her father's neck.

Bob followed the direction of the girl's eyes, without raising his head, and smiled.

"Hello! there's Lucius." He made a hollow over his mouth with his two hands, and in a peculiarly winning voice cried out, "La, la! poop, poop!" It was the call of the homestead.

The man responded with a wave of his hand in the air.

"He is an uncommonly well-built fellow, and is as good as he looks," said Bob quite as if he were talking to himself.

Low as were the words, the Boss heard. A queer little light flickered in her gray eyes for one second; then it was gone. Presently she went over and sat down beside Bob. Her manner was peculiarly gentle and quiet.

After a while, when Lucius had comfortably seated himself in an easy-chair, Uncle

Rufus came out with an encore of "juleps."

"Rufus," said the Colonel, "I want you to ride over to Buckingham to-morrow and see about those chickens."

"Yes, seh," answered Rufus with a grimace.

"What's the matter now ?"

"Nuttin', seh."

"I know," said Lucius, laughing under his breath. "Rufus says Buckingham ain't fit for hogs to root in."

"Did you say that ?" asked the Colonel sternly.

Rufus looked solemn.

"Answer me, sir !" thundered the Colonel.

"I don' know nuttin' 'bout dat, seh. But I did say dat Gord had some poor dirt, an' a han'ful o' rocks, an' he trow'd 'em down, an' dar wuz Buck'n'ham."

"Go along about your business !" exclaimed the Colonel. "Here ! Come back, you black rascal ! How did you get that rabbit I saw hanging up on your cabin-door ?"

"I seed him down in de woods, Massa, an' I jes' popped up meh gun and shot him th'o de lef' ear an' de right hin' foot."

“What?” cried the crowd in a chorus.

Rufus blew out his nostrils like a trombone. His cheeks looked like dried persimmons. He smacked his thick lips and regarded the Colonel with a benign smile.

“You see, Marse Cun'l, jes' as I up wid meh gun, dat onery rabbit scratched he lef' ear wid he right hin' foot an' pop go de gun, an' of cose de bullet don' go clean th'o' he lef' ear an' he right hin' foot.”

The Colonel shook his fist and ordered Rufus away.

Rufus grinned, made a low bow and shuffled into the house, leaving an echo of his loud, squeaking boots behind. When he had disappeared the Colonel burst into a loud fit of laughter.

“Um—m, Lordy, you can't beat him. That reminds me of an old nigger my father owned. Jefferson Washington Cameron was his name. Jefferson was a white-headed old rascal, whose life was one protracted drunk. Just before he died, he got religion and became a Baptist preacher. His first sermon was on drink. He wanted to show the congregation that God did not advocate abstemiousness, and as an example gravely pointed to the Bible. ‘Hi—look hyah,’ said he; ‘look th'o' de

Bible from de beginnin' o' de verse to Revolutions, dyah am only one man what axed fur water, an' he am in hell, whar he oughter be."

A chorus of laughter greeted the story.

The Boss held out her two little brown hands to Bob.

"Pull me up, and I'll play to you. Come into the parlor. Never mind the lamp; I can see well enough."

As she passed Lucius' chair, a tiny wisp of her sleeve brushed over his face. He raised his head suddenly. They looked steadily into each other's eyes.

"Better come, too," said Bob, over his shoulder.

Lucius shook his head. "I reckon I'm pretty comfortable where I am."

Through the distant bay-trees the sun was setting. No sound, save the shrill neigh of an impatient horse, or the hoarse croaking of a frog, broke the stillness. A scarlet light flooded the broad piazza, illuminating the figure of the Colonel. Both men were silent. Lucius pulled heavily at his cigar, but seemed in no mood to talk to anybody.

Suddenly, from the direction of the parlor, came a voice, soft and sweet as the

vapor of incense ; it increased in volume till the purple twilight itself was filled. One by one the notes rose till they seemed to reach the sky above. Unconsciously the two men yielded to the seduction of the hour.

"From the soul of an angel," Lucius said to himself.

A reminiscent dream inspired the Colonel. He felt the fingers of a soft little hand creep into his own, and saw amid a mass of chestnut curls a pair of violet eyes that flashed through a mist of tears. The vision glided on, as the soft voice of the Virginia girl poured itself out upon the evening air.

"My God !" Lucius inwardly exclaimed, dropping his face into his hands.

"Another ! Another !" cried Bob. "Give us a nigger song this time, Boss. That's a dear girl. The other was pretty, but rather depressing."

"All right," laughed the Boss. "Here's one for you especially, but you'll have to get the banjo. It's over in the corner behind the sofa. Thanks ! It's almost in tune. There, now," and she rattled off that brilliant though trite ditty, "Juggity Jug":

"Juggity Jug !
Whar's dat jug ?
Juggity Jug !
Old stone jug !
Juggity Jug !
Broken-mouthed jug.
Juggity Jug !
Old whisky-jug.
Juggity Jug !"

"That's my taste, is it ?" exclaimed Bob laughing. "You vixen ! I'll pay you out for it."

Lucius heard a smothered cry of impatience and a sound that made him snap his teeth together.

"What's up ?" asked the Colonel.

"Nothing," replied the man. "I just killed a mosquito."

"They're pretty bad to-night," innocently remarked the Colonel.

Inside the parlor, by the piano, Bob was saying, in a tone of adoration: "Sweetheart, I'm not half good enough for you!" Drawing his chair nearer to the girl, he continued: "Boss, I reckon if you were to throw me over I would go plump to the devil."

"So-o ?" said the Boss, inconsequently. Through the window she could see the red spark at the end of Lucius' cigar. She

suddenly became conscious of a lump rising in her throat.

"Bob," she said excitedly, quickly springing up and walking about the room, "I don't think I am a success, anyway. I wonder if we are suited to one another. Hold on a minute!" as she heard his low exclamation. "We've known each other since we were so high."

She was behind him now, so that he could not see the movement, but he knew that she was measuring from the floor with her hand.

"You've kind of grown accustomed to me. There is so much in—what do you call it? Propinquity," she went on musingly. "Don't you think so? Perhaps, after all, if you were to go away, say abroad—stay there for a year—you might meet some other girl you like better. Suppose you try it," she suggested softly.

"Well, I swear," said Bob, with good-humored roughness, leaning suddenly forward and looking at her with loving directness. "You ought to know me better. Although I am a lazy, good-for-nothing fellow, I'm not utterly devoid of human feeling. I love you, 'presch' (an abbreviation of his own for precious),

and shall never love any one else," he added simply.

The Boss resumed her seat at the piano. Her elbow, which fell upon the keys with a sudden passionate movement, produced a frightful discord. She was looking beyond and over him through the window.

"I shall be so good to you, darling," he continued, the languid tone taking on a sudden interest. "So devoted. You will have everything you want. I will be your slave, Boss, always, just as I have been since the Colonel gave you to me years ago, when you wore pinafores and your hair in a pig-tail. You don't believe in me a bit. Never mind ; after we are married, I'll force you to. Because I seem stupid and—"

The Boss jumped up. Impulsively she put out both hands to him, for she felt compunction.

"Don't abuse yourself any more, dear old honest boy. You've got me, and I'll do the best I can by you." Her under lip trembled in the darkness. "I hear Mammy," she continued, indicating the sound of approaching footsteps. "I wonder if Cerity is worse to-night?"

"Miss Boss, honey, ez yo' heah?"

inquired the negress, as her bandanna loomed up ghost-like beneath the lintel of the door.

"Yes, over by the piano. What is it?"

"I'm dat anxious 'bout Cerity, honey. I kyahn't git her to notice nuttin'; I done put de flat-iron to her feet, but she don't act 'sponsible like. White folks say niggers don't faint, but dat gal done faint four times dis mawnin'. De las' time she done go off in one ob dem spells, when she come to, she mos' jump out de chair, an she give a sort o' cry. Fo' Gord, I b'lieve Cerity done been conjured. She look mighty myster'us, honey, I tell yo'."

"Did you give her the blackberry brandy before supper, Mammy?"

"Yes, honey, o' cours' I did. But it sut'n'y ez cu'yus it done do her no mo' good dan hog food. Sut'n'y ez cu'yus, for hit meks me feel right pert."

"Have you put her to bed?" asked Bob.

"No, she's laying' dyah in de big rocker Massa Lucius sont her from his chamber, wid her haid on her pa's arm. Dat nigger's been 'neelin' wid his arm roun' her for mo' dan an hour. He ain' eat nuttin' sence dinner. You kyahn't put no 'pendance in him nohow. Massa Lucius ez

mighty good ; he jes' as 'fectionate as ef she b'longst to white folks. He sut'n'y ez good to dat nigger gal."

" I'll go back with you, Mammy. Perhaps if I sing to her we might get her to sleep."

It was late when the Boss closed the door of the little cabin where Cerity lay sleeping quietly. Just before leaving she heard Mammy say to Rufus, in what was intended to be a whisper :

" Come 'long, ole man, de supper ez settin' on de table. I ez warm de cake over. Does yo' feel cramped, honey ? "

The Boss smiled as she bade the old woman good-night, and added: " Mind, Mammy, if she gets worse, call me at once." As she stepped out into the darkness, a man's figure crossed the patch of moonlight, and came swiftly towards her.

It was Lucius.

" I've been waiting for you," he said.

The Boss regarded him languidly, with her gray eyes half closed.

" Thank you. I'm right tired to-night. Cerity was so hard to get to sleep " (she smothered off a frown). " Poor little foster sister," she continued, " I reckon she's going to die. Once or twice while I was

singing she was seized with terrible pains in her side. It is strange that Cerity should be always ailing, and I'm such a healthy girl. "Lucius," she added softly, as her five fingers closed for a moment on his arm, "I want to apologize for what I said yesterday morning. I've been mighty sorry ever since."

The man shook his head and answered slowly, "My girl, there is nothing to be sorry for. You've always been good to me, Boss. I have been a better man for knowing you. The knowledge of this fact has given me more happiness than I ever imagined would fall to my lot." Suddenly he reached out and placed her little hand within his arm.

"I had no right to speak as I did," he continued. "I want to say to you, honey, that I hope you will be very happy with dear old Bob. He loves you as much as—" He was going to say "as I do," but changed his mind and added "deeply." "He's a mighty good fellow. Everybody likes him, and I'm sure he will make you a good husband." His voice sank, but softened. "I can't think of you being a married woman, somehow, dear. Can you?"

"No," she said, then paused. "No, I can't."

Then there was a moment of silence.

The Boss waited, thinking there would be another word from him. Lucius was conscious only of the girl beside him, in her white frock, with her head drooping close to his shoulder. He felt himself leaning over the fragrant braids of her hair. He almost kissed them with his lips. He imagined it, or did she come a trifle closer to him? The next instant he had raised his head.

"My girl," he cried out passionately, "what is love anyhow? Define it. Is it to feel that you would do anything for the one you love, even to sacrificing your own peace of mind, and sending your soul to perdition? Answer me, Boss!"

She could not. Her lips moved as he had bidden her, but her voice was unintelligible. She seemed to breathe the words, "I don't know."

Tears trembled in her eyes and ran down her pallid cheeks; he raised her hand to his mouth.

"I have made you cry, my girl. I ought to feel sorry, but I cannot—I cannot. So help me God!"

“ Lucius ! Lucius ! ” she pleaded. “ Please ! ” Her eyes were in his. Her lips were so parched that she could scarcely articulate. “ You must not—you must not ! ”

“ Boss,” the tone was one of deep agony now. “ As God is my judge, I mean no disrespect to you—no wrong to my friend,” he went on hurriedly. “ I have tried to be silent, but I have failed. Let me finish,” he whispered. “ It may relieve the anguish.”

He struck his breast a sharp blow, as if to dispel a load, and then continued passionately: “ I have loved you from the first. I think it was a sort of instinct. I love you so tenderly, Boss, that all my life seems as nothing beside it. Pity me ! Help me, honey ! I love you and I am to lose you.”

He looked down at her, his face drawn with pain.

“ I have felt many agonies, but none so great as this. Fate is making a hard reckoning with me. I know I should have remained silent. It was the right and honorable thing to do, but it was beyond my strength. God ! beyond human strength, I believe.”

The girl seemed to be thinking. The fire in her eyes died away to a dull ash color.

“Lucius,” she said pathetically, “I belong to Bob. He is your friend.” She caught at her breast, as if it hurt her, and then continued : “I also am weak ; I can stand a good deal. Don’t tempt me.”

“My girl, you’re an angel,” he said, as he gazed deep down into the half-unwilling but wholly fascinating eyes.

Through the night noises sounded the voice of the Colonel. They could see him standing on the piazza, the light of one flickering lamp-flame, held high above his head, and falling on his snow-white hair.

“ Daughter, it is late. Time you were in bed. The wind has shifted, Lucius, and the glass is falling. We are going to have a storm to-night.”

The Boss, in a dazed way, drew her hand across her forehead.

“ Ah ! Is it so late ? Good-night,” and with a slight gesture of farewell she turned and left him.

“ Sweet dreams, my humming-bird,” said the Colonel, stopping her to kiss her forehead and hand, as she passed him on her way upstairs.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. CARTER had bidden the "Warrenites" to a tea. For some time the female portion of the community had concluded the work of extravagant preparation.

Boxes filled with every conceivable style of pomp and vanity had been dragged out from dusty closets, and their contents scattered about in all directions. Old and young heads were close together, discussing the merits of different kinds of sleeve-patterns.

There had been little discrimination shown in the selection of guests, major and minor; in fact, all within the pale of gentility had been favored with an invitation.

The cards read "five o'clock."

The tea was to be given at Mrs. Carter's homestead, one of the handsomest in Warren. From the great square hall, with its bewildering array of ancestors,

the furniture had been carefully removed, the lawn arranged for tennis and croquet.

The day broke in forces of yellow light, the weather had turned cooler, the air was crisp and delightful.

As Colonel Cameron, the Boss and Bob drove up in a tandem, escorted by Lucius on Lucille, the mellow notes of the piano, coupled with the merry sounds of the fiddle, greeted their ears.

Mrs. Carter, her white head bare, looking youthful to admiration, received them cordially at the foot of the steps. Though a little past middle age, she showed traces of beauty and dignity of manner that were most attractive.

"Come right up," she said, in her charming Southern way. "Howdy, Colonel? Boss, my child, give me a kiss. Glad to see you, Mr. Bob. You, too, Mr. Lucius. Washington, show the gentlemen where to put their things. Boss, come with me; I reckon you'll be glad to take off your hat."

Five minutes later the Boss stood obliquely, with her three-quartered face turned to the pier-glass that hung slanting from the wall in Mrs. Carter's chamber. She was smoothing her hair, which pos-

essed a style of its own ; it ran away from her low forehead in drowsy little curls. Mrs. Carter looked with delight at the rich coloring in the girl's face.

"Boss, you resemble your mother more every day, and she was the most superb creature I ever saw."

The girl regarded her with gratitude.

"Thank you, dear Miss Patsy," she replied softly. "You couldn't pay my father or me a higher compliment."

The Boss wore a clinging gown of some gauzy black material, bespangled with yellow butterflies, with only a streak of gold and a pendant of turquoise about her neck, and a tiara of turquoise and pearls over her brow. As they descended they found themselves imprisoned on the steps. A set of lancers was in full swing. A man looking as if he were forced into a new suit of yellow linen, with stiff, sandy locks glued down on both sides of his retreating forehead, waved in his hand, like a banner, a purple-bordered handkerchief, as he cried out the figures.

"Ladies to the centre ! Ladies, I said. A little livelier, please !

"Swing yo' corners ! Back again ! Now, grand chain !"

"What do they look like?" asked Lucius, close to the girl's elbow.

"Lunatics!" she laughed, leaning over the balustrades. "They look so warm and red. Do you see that man over there—the one without his vest, and the girl next to him wearing that magenta poplin? Well, I heard him tell her just now that he wanted to gallop with her, and that he could sling her anywhar she wanted to be slung."

Lucius laughed heartily; he had a keen sense of the ridiculous.

"Isn't this a lark?" said Bob in his lazy drawl. "I just wish you could see Ben Buff, the dyke he's on. He's wearing a broad-brim hat and blue baize leggins. Dance, Boss?"

"Lucius, why don't you ask Miss Daw?" he continued. "I tell you, she's a dandy! She belongs in Buckingham, you know. She told me just now she was 'all over in a sweat, and pineapple-ice made her stomach ache, and she didn't like chicken-salad because the meat stuck in her teeth.'"

The Boss and Lucius both laughed.

"A very descriptive *tout ensemble*," said Lucius.

"Come along, Boss," continued Bob airily. "I want to show these people what the art of dancing really is."

"Listen to him," laughed the Boss, raising herself slowly. "He talks like a Kentuckian."

The man looked at her wistfully.

"Your wit is so quick and original, my dear. You seem to feel my characteristics by instinct."

Boss curled her short lip disdainfully.

"Fiddlesticks !"

"Better take my advice, Lucius. There she is, over by the door—the one with the uncommonly jolly proportions."

"Thank you, Bob," murmured Lucius sarcastically. "I wouldn't think of depriving you."

Bob dropped his arm about the Boss' waist, and together they glided off.

She danced with a wonderful air. Her little black satin toes crept in and out in exquisite time to the music, now fast, now slow. One by one the other couples stopped and lined the walls and steps to watch them. The girl was incomparably graceful. The folds of her black gown seemed to float about her, forming an undulating background to her loveliness.

Lucius remained upon the steps, his passionate love beating full upon his brain. Once the girl looked up as they swept by. Their eyes met and clung in each other's gaze. The wild blood mounted to his head, he fell against the balustrade like a drunken man.

"Stop!" said the Boss panting, "I'm tired."

Bob exclaimed, "Glorious! Oh the devil!" he continued, "here comes that Sawyer man. Will you come out on the lawn?"

The girl answered quickly, "Yes."

She hardly knew where he was leading her, being conscious only of that look from Lucius, which had been so short and yet so deliriously sweet. Suddenly she heard some one call her name in a quick, imperative voice.

"Boss! Boss! Dear, dear old girl! I am so glad to see you again."

Two little arms went about her neck, and a crimson, panting mouth was pressed against her own.

"Meg Cozzens! You!" exclaimed Boss and Bob together.

"That's about the size of it. Don't open your eyes so big; they make me feel quite

bogey," she declared, as she beamed upon them both with an ecstatic grin.

"Well, aren't you glad to see me?" she asked petulantly. "At any rate, shake hands, Bob."

The Boss put her arms around the girl, and then kissed her delightedly.

She was a slender little creature, with great glistening blue eyes and a thick mop of brown hair. Her hands were tiny, with small, nervous fingers that couldn't stretch an octave.

"I don't understand," Boss said, "what made you come back? When did you get here? How—"

"Hold on, Sis," said Meg. "Give a fellow a show. I'll answer in rotation. What made me come back? I was a failure. As an actress I won't do. I saw too many people who could do so much better than I that it discouraged me. When did I get here? Two hours ago. Nobody expected me, and when I found all my kin had an invite to this tea, I decided to add my presence to the festive board."

"Well, I'll be doggoned," said Bob, regarding her with affectionate interest. He liked Meg. She had been an especial pet of his years before she went away to become

an actress. "How do you like the stage? Did it come up to your expectations?"

"Beastly!" answered Meg laconically.

"I say, Boss, you are prettier than ever. I tell you what, Bob, you couldn't find a Yankee girl to touch her. You'd make up beautifully," she continued, looking at Boss critically. "Your eyes would look like wholesale moons with a little blue cosmetic under them."

"Blue!" said the Boss, her eyebrows travelling up her forehead; "I thought they always used black."

"Only amateurs use black," answered Meg airily. "Blue softens, makes the eyes languishing—don't you know? However, I've got my box with me, and I'll make you up some day."

"You'll have her stage-struck next, if you don't mind," laughed Bob. "But I say, Meg, did you come out all right? I mean didn't you fall in love with any of those footlight fellows?"

Meg gave a sudden start, a vibration that seemed to pass from head to foot. It was over in an instant, but the Boss observed it.

"You are a goose, Bob," Meg answered, in her most matter-of-fact tone. "Jingo," she cried, "there's the Colonel, and Lucius,

too. He'd make a fine Romeo. By-bye. I'm going the rounds—first to kiss the Colonel, then to beat up my relations. Be over to-morrow to play tennis," she called over her shoulder. "Got a dandy racket."

"Dear little Meg," said the Boss tenderly, watching her disappear among the crowd of summer dresses. "I certainly am glad to see her back. Queer, though. She says she was a failure. The last letter I got from her was full of enthusiasm, and—"

Just then Lucius came towards her with a plate of cream.

"Bob, Mrs. Carter is looking for you ; wants you to feed the Daw," he added gravely.

The Boss took a spoonful of ice-cream and examined it.

"Pineapple, I think," Lucius said. "Looks cold, though I was afraid you would be warm after dancing."

A glow spread over her forehead, chin and throat.

"You are very thoughtful. Did you get some for yourself?" she asked.

"No," he answered curtly, "I never eat sweets."

"What ! Why, ice-cream is the creed

of our country. Thanks," said the Boss, returning him the empty saucer. "It was good. Will you walk a little? It's so much pleasanter outside."

Lucius hesitated.

She smiled brilliantly upon him.

"Well, isn't it? Don't you think so?"

For a little while they walked back and forth in silence, and then paused upon an elevation behind the house.

"Picturesque, isn't it?" asked the Boss, indicating the panorama with a wave of her little brown hand.

They both gazed long ahead of them, and this is what they saw: A superb sky—a glimpse of the river between the hills, great patches of golden grain—a slumbrous pool of water—a profusion of wild flowers, a girl leading a gray donkey up a hill, and a stream of water by a tall bank.

They heard a whip-poor-will calling, calling. Then, by some strange mesmeric power, their gaze turned simultaneously from the scene, and they stared into each other's eyes for a second.

The Boss felt helpless. Suddenly she seemed to collect her thoughts, but not a word was spoken. Lucius felt a cold chill pass over him and run down his back.

"Let's walk on," said the girl.

"Perhaps you'd like to go back to the house," he muttered moodily.

The Boss regarded him with surprise.

"Thank you, I'm quite comfortable here."

Lucius walked beside her, with his head bent close to his breast. He was recalling the whole course of their acquaintance. It had an every-day, commonplace commencement, five years and a half ago. He remembered that she looked like a Niobe, all dripping with water. The boat had upset and she had fallen into the river. How she laughed and shook her long mane of Titian-copper hair when he advised her to hurry up and change, or she would take cold. With what admiration he had watched her, drawn to her superb youth in spite of himself. The admiration had begotten love, and now—

Here the reverie was suddenly broken. A great golden butterfly, its wings just tipped with black, and little blue rings in the centre, poised upon his sleeve.

"Don't let it go! Oh, what a beauty!" cried the Boss.

Lucius caught it, holding the dainty wings between his forefinger and thumb.

“What a curious little beggar ! Do you ever think how he came into the world ? A dull senseless creature. Then he goes through a metamorphosis, and changes into an exquisite insect, literally pulsating with delight. And what a little epicure he is, to be sure ! But take care, my young friend,” he said, addressing the butterfly, “All is not gold that glitters. Some day you’ll be lured by a poisonous plant ; then woe unto you ! A sip, and you are gone,” he climaxed gravely. “There be off, you idler.” He opened his fingers, and the little creature turned giddily in the air above their heads, then he flew away mockingly.

Lucius watched him and laughed.

“I think he knows more than he cares to tell. Of all animated nature they are certainly the most curious, except perhaps—” he paused, and then added slowly, “Woman,”

“What !” exclaimed the Boss opening her eyes with astonishment. “Why attribute that rather doubtful adjective to us exclusively ? I think the male portion of this world might lay claim to a small amount of that without trespassing upon our reserves.”

"Do you?" he answered gently, but showed no disposition to continue the argument. So they walked on in silence.

"Meg has returned," he said abruptly. "Wasn't that a surprise? Did she write you she was coming back?"

"No, I was as much astonished as you. I'm afraid she has been disappointed, somehow. Oh, no—not in the profession itself, but in the people she's been thrown with. Meg is a true little woman, and you may be sure the cause was a good one that made her abandon her purpose," she finished loyally.

"Look here," said Lucius, after one of those long periods of silence, his brown eyes fixed upon her lips. "Are you going to live in Richmond after your marriage?" He did not wince, but his face had a curious expression, half fierce, half tender.

"Yes," she answered briefly. There was something the Boss wanted to say to him, but it was so hard to commence. Her eyes dropped. She moved restlessly, then changed the position of her head, as if trying to avoid his glance.

"I want Bob to go in business," she commenced. "I am going to try and incite him to a higher ambition. I want

him to make the best and most of his life. He has rather a better start than most men—he has heart and brains ; and oh, I should be so proud to be a part of every success he developed ; I want him to become prominent by his own industry, for that is the kind of person I admire. Don't you agree with me ? ” she asked, her eyes returning from the hills.

The question brought no answer.

Lucius' face had taken on a haggard, white look. His heart was aching with a wild, passionate jealousy. His whole soul was reaching out to this slip of a girl, who was the property of his friend—his best friend, too. While he—God ! He caught his breath with a spasm that seemed almost a *stab*.

“ Your father—you will leave him here ? ” he added. It was an effort to speak at all.

“ Yes, that will be the hardest,” answered the Boss. “ Ever since mamma died he has lived on the plantation. I don't remember his ever leaving me for a day. You see I never knew a mother.”

“ There has been the same lack in my life as in yours,” answered Lucius.

“ Yes,” continued the girl, “ I have

often wondered how it would have been if mamma had lived. I can't remember even her face. Everybody says—besides, her pictures show it—she must have been very beautiful. She lived just long enough to give me a name—Mildred Lee Cameron, after the dear old General. It is twenty years in August since she died."

"Twenty years?"

"Yes. You must have been a very little boy then," Lucius. Why, you couldn't have been more than eight years old. Can you remember as far back as that?"

"Yes."

"You must have been a strong little fellow," she continued thoughtfully.

"Yes—I reckon I was." He pushed back his hair and laughed, suddenly looking boyish and happy. He turned and examined her slowly from head to foot.

"And you must have been a strong little girl." They both smiled with amusement.

"And have you no longing for the world, for the so-called city life?" Lucius continued,

"Not the least bit in the world. I have always imagined society in the city friv-

olous and unprincipled. I am satisfied with my hills. Everything about here is so free, open, and honest," she answered simply. Then she shaded her eyes with her hands.

"I love all this." She turned suddenly toward him. The twilight had deepened into a soft purple. It gave his features a shadowy look. "Do you know, Lucius," she continued, "I think you are throwing yourself away here, too. I have felt it for a long time. There seems to be so much more in you than just sitting down, praying for the rain to come, or cursing because the frost has killed your crops. I can't tell what it is, but you seem out of your element. I can better imagine you as a great lawyer or a statesman—or—or—anything but just what you are."

"God! I guess you are right, Boss," whispered the man.

"I wish," continued the girl gently, ignoring the interruption, "that you would exert yourself, and start out into the work-a-day world of men and women. I know it's hard to change the current of your old life—to make a vital change; but you should conquer, not surrender. You ought to be a great man, Lucius. The secret of your

success would be your individuality, your strength and great magnetism ; it would give you a wonderful influence over mankind." The Boss stopped for a moment, then continued : " A woman is a dependent sort of a creature that needs attention and protection. It is different with a man. I wish you would consider what I am saying, by the light of your reason ; for you are doing an injury to society by hiding your talents here in these hills. God has endowed you with valuable gifts. He has meant that you should use them, not—" She stopped helplessly, it was so difficult to express just what she wanted to say.

" Thank you, Boss," Lucius interrupted, looking at her with yearning tenderness. He stopped her by raising his hand, when she would have continued. " I appreciate all you say ; but, my girl, I reckon you overestimate my abilities. It is not as if I hadn't tried—I have. All the long years before I knew you, and the end is—what ? Why, I am a farmer, and I will be satisfied until—you go." He finished almost under his breath.

The bay-trees grew taller in the fading light. The dogwood looked like white,

waving arms on every side. Soon darkness tumbled its sable curtains over all the land, and night was upon them.

"May I have a dance, Boss?" Lucius asked gently.

"Yes."

He offered his arm, which she took silently, and together they came in sight of Bob, walking slowly up and down, smoking a valedictory cigarette.

CHAPTER V.

HIGH in the heavens rose the sun. It flooded the earth with a mellow light like yellow wine. A soft breeze, dashed with the scent of Virginia woods in full wild flower, and fresh turf—the perfume sweet, subtle, almost elusive, was expressed in the air.

“Po-pa,” said the Boss.

“Yes, humming-bird, what is it?”

“Suppose a man—a person, you know,” the girl went on dreamily, “were to give his word and then wanted to break it, would it be called a dishonorable action?”

“Most decidedly, daughter.”

“And one who so dishonors himself should do what?”

“Die: it is the only redemption. Sometimes even death cannot redeem. Honor, pet, is the safeguard to virtue. It is a subtle sensibility that saves human nature

from degradation. To destroy honor in a woman's soul is like crushing the perfume from a flower. Be assured that half her virtue goes with it."

The Boss drew a long, full breath.

"Ah !"

She felt a horror of herself—a horror sudden and sharp. It was like a man walking on the brink of a precipice, conscious of the frightful declivity, yet powerless to avert the catastrophe. She felt that danger was imminent. From her narrow point of view, her secret love for Lucius was a dishonor. She thought if she once gave way she would forever close behind her the gates of happiness ; for hers was a nature that, without perfect accord of conscience, life would be a series of torturous conflicts.

Involuntarily the girl looked up at him. Since the first realization of her love for Lucius had forced itself upon her, she had felt a sense of isolation from her father. With keen, agonizing consciousness came the thought that she was no longer worthy of his respect. Though she had not sinned in deed, she had erred in thought.

She locked her hands tightly behind her. There was an appealing look in her

eyes—a silent, wistful plea for pardon, as she gazed up at her father, and exclaimed :

“ Darling Po-pa ! ”

The Colonel’s abstracted face melted into a look of tenderness.

“ Daughter.”

He bent down and kissed her on the lips.

“ Come,” said the girl ; “ they are calling us to dinner.”

They walked on hand in hand. There was an added tenderness in the man’s grasp ; a nervous, excited, shy fluttering of the girl’s heart.

While they were discussing the merits of the first course, the dining-room door was flung open suddenly, and Meg rushed in with a quick, decided impetus, like the shot from a catapult.

The dining-room was spacious, flanked on every side with wide windows that opened out from floor to ceiling, and were shaded by curtains of blue cretonne. A light yellow matting in new condition covered the floor. An old-fashioned sofa of tempting thickness, huge in width and breadth, dominated one corner of the apartment. And two enormous carved

rockers, with leather seats, constituted the rest of the furniture. The table was oblong, set with superb china of prehistoric date. The odor of crushed mint permeated the air.

"Just imagine, I've lost my racket," exclaimed Meg, crossing the floor. She drew a chair near to the Colonel's elbow, and nodded her head in general greeting. "It was such a dear."

"Doggone it, that's too bad," said Bob, with his rare sympathetic smile. "How did you manage it?"

"Dunno. Thought I packed it up, but guess I was mistaken. You see," she continued, raising her voice and addressing the Boss at the other end of the table, "I was awfully late; I had to regularly hump myself to catch the train. Just did manage it by the skin of my teeth. Here you, my pie-eating friend," she cried, giving Bob a vigorous poke, "I'd like an expression of those pickles myself. Will you join me, Colonel?"

"I reckon not," the Colonel answered. "If you will excuse the bluntness of an old soldier, I would suggest that you confine yourself to a mere suspicion; they are mighty unwholesome."

"Listen," said the Boss. "What splendid inconsistency! We parade them before our guests, but label them 'Hands off!'"

"They agree with me all right enough," said Bob. "I eat 'em for breakfast every morning, and never felt better in my life."

"It ain't the pickles 'hun'," said Meg dryly. "It's because you've never thought half so little of yourself, and—her head swerved meaningly towards the head of the table—"and half so much of other people. Self-annihilation is the best elixir-vitæ in the world."

The Boss tried not to smile and asked :

"Would you like to ride or drive after dinner, Meg? We can give you a first-rate mount."

"I'm afraid you will have to use the team," said Lucius, meeting the Boss' eyes, then glancing past her and regarding the wall with careful scrutiny. "The Brier is being shod."

The Boss laughed nervously.

"All right, we'll drive to Scotsville with the team."

"What's the joke?" the Colonel asked, glancing up from his plate.

The Boss' color rose.

Lucius shifted his steady, characteristic gaze to the Colonel, and said :

"Only Rufus shuffling in the yard. He is enough to make any one laugh."

"So he is, durn his soul ; so he is," answered the Colonel.

"Lucius," said Bob, "I tried that 'green' youngster this morning, and had the devil of a time with him."

"What did he do ?"

"Why, he's a regular Colossus of Rhodes in horse-flesh. He balked so suddenly, in a half-mile dash I made, that I came very near getting a nasty cropper. I sickened him though, doggone it ! I bet a dollar he won't be so anxious to try it again."

"Why, how did you fix him ?"

"I dragged his nose close against my knee, and with my right spur drove him around like a peg-top, until the blood ran from my rowels. Then I gave him his head. It wasn't much use to him for a while, you can just bet, for he came mighty near falling. I urged him forward, however, to the top of his speed, and he'd have been going yet if I hadn't wanted my dinner."

"Of whom did you buy him?" asked the Boss.

"Cecil Beresford, the young Englishman who bought the Harrison farm."

"What did he 'rush' you for him?" asked Meg.

"Two fifty."

"Pounds?"

"No, Miss Simpleton, dollars."

"He's so conservative, it's a wonder he didn't engage an agent to drive the bargain," said the Boss.

"La," laughed Meg. "Never mind how intimately you know a Britisher, he always keeps the English channel between you and him."

"That's so," replied Bob smiling. "The other day, at the Carters' tea, I happened to be standing next to young Lowther, arrayed like the lilies of the field. He was smoking a fat regalia and looked like a great, green, conceited boy. In a moment of affability, though I had never been formally presented, I said: 'Beautiful day, isn't it?' He turned on me his long upper lip and short nose, and glared with a perfect British stare; then turned and fastened his eyes upon the door with idiotic

vacancy. 'I beg your pardon,' he said in curt monosyllables.

"I said, 'beautiful day.'"

"'Aw ! It may be and it may not be ; but if it is, that is no reason for your addressing me with such familiarity.' I doubled up my fist, and came mighty near teaching this impenetrable form of British rudeness what one of 'our fellows' knew of manners. I thought better of it, however, and left him with a superior smile."

Lucius turned abruptly to Meg, and said :

"You've been gone two years, Meg ; did you return heart-whole ?"

"Ah—ah !" she said in a breathless little way ; "I have learned a very sad lesson. I find that all the men I know are getting too old for me. My heart remains young, verdant, while theirs—"

Bob looked up and stared, and then burst out laughing.

Meg drew her brows together in a decided frown, and stared back at him.

"What is it that convulses your risibilities, may I ask ?"

"Oh, nothing," he stopped with a broken laugh.

Meg curled her lips with a flash of disdain.

"Why not try the susceptibilities of an old soldier?" asked the Colonel.

"That is a fortress that would never surrender."

Meg tossed back the answer, with a droop of her long lashes, an abyss of coquetry in her blue eyes.

The Colonel smoothed his moustache from his fine old mouth, and took a cup of coffee from Rufus.

"Will you order the horses?" the Boss said, holding up her head with a funny little cough and a turn of her neck towards Bob. "You might ride down and meet us, you know, on our way back." She turned to go and then paused irresolutely. "You too, Lucius," she added. To the others it sounded like an after-thought.

With a sharp movement Lucius pushed away his chair, and got up from the table. He went over to the corner of the mantel and reached for his gun; then put out his hand for the cartridge-belt. With his hand half extended, he turned and fixed his eyes upon the Boss. She was looking in the opposite direction, but he regarded her intently.

“Thank you, I shall be busy this afternoon.” His fingers moved quickly along the edge of the cartridge-belt. “Don’t pretend that you will miss me. That’s too absurd a defence.”

He finished with a short laugh, wheeled away, and then closed the door behind him.

“La !” said Meg, holding up her head with a stare.

The Boss crossed the room.

“It’s ever so much nicer out of doors. Let’s get ready now.” She had turned away her face as if to look at the sky.

The Colonel glanced up as they were leaving the room. “‘Pears to me, ‘Huckle,’ you are looking poorly.”

The Boss seemed confused. She was taken by surprise. Bob nodded. He was standing against the low dining-table, his feet crossed, smoking a cigarette.

“You do look perky, sho’ enough.”

“Nonsense, I only want exercise.”

“Is that it ?” said the Colonel with a sigh of relief. “Be careful, the winds carry a storm, I’m thinking.”

She made a sweet gesture and closed the door.

The Colonel relapsed into his stuffed

chair, and turned his gaze upon the eastern half of the view seen from the window.

* * * * *

When they had climbed the tall hill behind the post-office, the Boss gave the horses their heads.

It was a long stretch of level ground, with great hills rolling off from each side.

"Boss," said Meg suddenly, "I've got something to tell you."

The Boss flashed a little laugh.

"I know. It's about your coming back so suddenly."

Meg nodded her head and stared. She had blanched to a dead white.

"Oh, I see. Boss, you are clever."

"It was this way," she began, a visible trembling in the saucy voice. "What I told you yesterday, about my being a failure, was a lie. I wasn't. I made a hit. As the books say, I woke up one morning and found myself famous. I exaggerate my importance a little, you think. Anyhow, I was spoken of as a very promising young comédienne." She paused and laughed tremulously. "O Boss! I was so contented and happy. Don't you recollect how I was always dying to play at theatri-

cals in the old days ? Well, this life suited me down to the ground."

She stopped abruptly, and then began again, her eyes fixed on the clear green of the young corn.

"There is always an Adam for every Eve. This time Adam and the serpent were all one and the same person. Boss," she continued more quickly, "I fell in love,—it was my first, and it was a terrible attack."

She shut her eyes and twisted her glove tightly between her strained finger-tips.

"I guess I am a little disconnected in my discourse. I'll get it straight in a minute."

The Boss turned her head around as though she meant to interrupt her, but changed her mind and returned to the scrutiny of the horse's ears. Meg continued:

"He was a grand-looking fellow, with black eyes and that earnest, sympathetic way about him which is so seductive. Everybody was crazy over him. He was our leading man."

The Boss raised her eyebrows inquisitively.

"Leading man," explained Meg, "is the

one who plays the best male parts. He's the high cockelorum in the company."

"Oh yes," said the Boss, nodding her head in assent. "I know."

"Why, matinee-days, the people almost fought for seats, he was so popular. The papers raved. The women acted like mad. From the first he seemed to take to me." The piquant little face had grown white and drawn around the lips. "And I—I—O Boss ! I just worshipped him. He was so different from any one I had ever seen before. It was like a gift straight from God ; I was bewildered by my good fortune. One night he stopped me in the wings ; the play was 'The Silver King,' and he told me he loved me."

She tossed back her head and laughed sharply.

"I believed him, poor little simpleton. I was such a fool ; if he had told me to, I should have crawled on my hands and knees. One day I asked permission to write and tell mamma of our engagement. He patted me on the cheek, and said : 'Wait until we play in Richmond ; I will tell her myself.'" Then the girl gave a sharp cry of pain. "I believed him, I did. The next Monday we were to open at Al-

baugh's, in Washington. We left after the performance on Saturday night, and my berth happened to be next to his. I was lying there thinking of my great happiness, when suddenly I heard voices. One was his. He was talking to the comedian, Mr. — Oh, but never mind his name."

She stopped for a minute, and then pressed her hands over her heart.

"This is what they said, Boss : 'What do you think of my newest ?'

" 'She's a rum little customer,' answered the comedian. " 'But doesn't she claw ?'

" 'Rather,' said my lover, 'she'll do when we strike the road. One-night stands are devilish lonesome, you know. By the way, my wife joins me in 'Frisco, I—'

"I didn't wait to hear the end. I put my head out between the curtains, and looked him straight in the eyes.

"I didn't know before that God let such low cowards as you live. Down in Virginia, where I come from, we shoot curs.'"

"He turned livid with rage, and so I jumped back and buttoned the curtains tight, and then covered up my head. I didn't sleep much, but lay there and

thought and thought until daylight. That's all," she finished in a whisper. "I left the next week, and shall never play again. The love for it has left me. It would never be the same. Can you understand that?"

"Perfectly," said the Boss, a tone of awful indignation in her voice. "That was a crime. For a man of the world to deliberately destroy a girl's first love is a crime. There can be no greater."

"That's it, Boss," said Meg slowly with her eyes half shut, and her pale lips pressed together. "That's it. I believed so in everything before, it will never, never be the same again. Life is an effort to me now." She put her hands up and covered her face, and when she lowered them her cheeks were wet.

"Dear little Meg!"

"Don't, Boss, don't! I hate pity. I only wanted you to know. I will never mention it again."

"I honor your confidence, dear. Thank you for telling me."

After they had driven a hundred yards in silence, the slanting rays of the sun seemed to increase in intensity and fill the world with glare.

The Boss pointed to the southeast with her whip.

"I am afraid we are going to have a storm. How quiet everything is ! "

"I reckon we are," answered Meg. "It looks mighty like it."

The country had now grown oppressively still. There was not a sign of life anywhere, and the two or three dogs they had met slunk away, and barked only after they had passed.

"Let's turn around," suggested the Boss.

A half-mile back they met a cart drawn by oxen. Two long planks rested across the wheels, and a man's figure was stretched lazily out upon his back. It was a negro eating an ear of corn. His shirt, open at the neck, showed his muscular chest half bare. Swarms of flies and gnats covered his face and hands. He saluted them respectfully as they drove by.

The sultriness grew insupportable. Everything on the earth became motionless. The tall hickory trees reared their proud heads defiantly ; but even they looked parched and dry.

"Lordy," whispered Meg.

"It will be on us in a minute, and I daren't touch the team with my whip,"

said the Boss. "Get up, Ananias ! Hurry, my beauties."

Suddenly the lightning shot from the sky. The horses, whose ears were acutely pitched to catch any sound, plunged forward, almost upsetting the buggy into a ditch that had eaten its way deep into the soil. Behind them lay the woods, rising like black broken masses, over which swept the purple clouds, now like moving banks of fire. Burst upon burst of thunder roared over their heads, returning in one uninterrupted echo from the mountains. The storm swept upon them with demoniacal fury.

"Don't get frightened, Meg." The Boss' words were measured and quite low, her heart was beating tempestuously.

"What are you doing ?" she asked presently.

"Praying," said Meg half crying. "I am saying the 'Our Father.'"

The horses became frightened, and almost tore the reins from the Boss' hands. The rain beat down in drops as big as a quarter. The earth flew up and formed a coating of red mud on their faces.

"Boss," said Meg, giggling hysterically, "you look like a Comanche Indian."

“Never mind me,” answered the Boss, her white teeth clinched hard, her arms aching fearfully from the strain. “Hold on to the sides. The horses are becoming unmanageable ; if they should bolt, God help us !”

In a moment there was a crash, like the upheaving of a planet. A short distance away, a great pepper-tree was shattered into fragments. The rain was coming slantwise now. It blinded them with its terrific force.

Blacker and blacker grew the day. On bounded the foaming horses, their ears nearly touching. On—on—it seemed like an eternity as they listened to the galloping hoofs. Suddenly, they heard the beat of other hoofs.

“Look out ! We will run into somebody,” gasped Meg.

Before the Boss could reply, a figure seemed to rise from the ground and sprang at the horses’ heads, with a wild cry :

“Thank God !”

“Lucius !”

In one tremendous wave, the blood flew through the Boss’ body to hands that were cold and trembling only a second before.

Meg leaned against the seat, white and

clammy. The shock was terrific. The horses, with great gasping breaths and furious plunges, were reined back upon their haunches, tugging to relieve themselves from the immense force that held them.

"Is it really you?" whispered the Boss. Only Meg heard her. She threw off the final stage of unrealism. "Of course it is! What other man could hold those beasts like that?"

"Lucius—you—got—here—just—in—time!" she cried at the top of her voice. The high winds carried the words past his ear.

"What—did—you—say? Wait—until—I—get—in; I—can't—hear—you!" he thundered back.

With a familiar hand he quieted down the trembling horses; then came to the side of the wagon, and without a word climbed over the muddy wheels and sat down between them. The Boss moved aside to give him room.

"Am I crowding you?" he whispered anxiously. "You are not hurt?"

He put his hand over and felt her dress.

"Sopping wet," he muttered. "Get up."

"You have forgotten Lucille," said Meg.

“No, I let her go back. Couldn’t hold her, for you looked like a moving avalanche coming through the blackness.” He laughed, but his lips trembled.

“We felt like it,” answered Meg, still in the emotional stage. “Didn’t we, Boss?”

“Yes.” The word fell soft, as the Boss leaned limp and helpless against the side of the buggy.

“Lucius, you will kill those beasts!” They were flying at terrific speed.

“I want to get you home. Boss is dripping wet.”

“So am I,” demurely remarked Meg.

“Of course you both are. You are more than likely to get a chill from this exposure.”

The Boss touched Lucius’ sleeve with pathetic hands.

“How did you manage to be in the road?”

“I guessed which way you had gone. And—well—here I am.”

“Bare-back?”

“Of course. You see, the storm came on so suddenly, I had to catch Lucille in the field, and it would have taken too long to go back to the stable.”

“ Oh,” said the Boss, in a voice rich and deep. A smile curved her beautiful mouth, but the tears still flashed in her eyes. Meg cuddled lovingly against Lucius’ wet sleeve, stilled into quietness by the knowledge of safety. None of the trio spoke again until they reached the house.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE week later the weather had grown hotter. The nights cooled slightly the parched earth, but the intense heat of the sun soon dried up the moisture. At noon none but the negroes could stand the fierce rays. Every morning, after breakfast, the Colonel dragged his big peat-bottom chair to the far end of the piazza, and watched the hands through his field-glass. They were chopping out the weeds between the corn, and grubbing out the blue-thistle in the low ground next to the river.

To-day, over by his cabin, under the shade of a locust-bush, lay Uncle Rufus at full length on the grass. He was gazing into space, but at regular intervals would try to see how far he could spout the tobacco-juice from his mouth.

Mammy sat in the doorway, cutting out a blue patch for the seat of his pants. She was dividing her conversation between

the occupants of the cabin and the negro at her feet, but now and then crooked her head around and peered into the darkened room, her full-orbed eyes squinting from the late contact with the rays of the sun.

"T'wards night, honey, yo' haid will ease up. Miss Boss gwine to sing an' play de banjo," and she commenced to cut vigorously.

"Ez she, Mammy? I ez glad."

The black woman dropped the scissors in her lap, and snapped her fingers.

"Yo' yappy-haided nigger! yo' better hump yo'se'f and git some sassafas fur tea. Lord! you ez de laziest buzzard I uver see. I wish I'd busted fo' I got yoked to yo' ole' carcass."

Rufus rolled the quid gently about in his mouth, and regarded his wife with a mellow smile.

"Mum—m, whar'uver yo' see carrion, yo' boun' to see de buzzard," he remarked sententiously.

"He! he! he!" came faintly from the darkened cabin.

"Hush, yo' disrespectable jaw! Look heah! De Bishop am gwine to preach in Buck'n'ham in de mawnin, an' Miss Boss

say you hitch up de red jumper fur all o' wees. An' I don' want dat lantern-jawed haws nuver—you heah ?”

“ Yes, I heah, Cindy. Fo' Gord, I b'live you talk jist to agervate me ! Cerity,” he called, “ I ez gwine to catch a bullfrog for you.”

“ I ain' hongry, pappy.”

The negro sat up, took the quid of tobacco from his mouth and shook his head mournfully.

“ Kyant you eat de legs, if I git 'em ?”

“ I ez feared I kyan't, pappy.”

“ Good Gord A'mighty !” And the rugged voice deepened into tenderness as he arose heavily from the ground.

“ Nor fish, Cerity ?”

“ No, pappy.” He swerved nearer the door.

“ Nor sassafas ?”

“ No, pappy.”

“ Whar you gwine ?” asked the old woman hurriedly, as she shuffled the sewing aside and rose to her feet. “ Whar you gwine ?”

“ I ez gwine fur de doctor,” the man answered simply.

“ Tiddy,” said his wife solemnly, “ 'tain't no use, Tiddy boy.” And then she went

over and laid her hand on his shoulder.

" 'Tain't no use."

" Why, 'tain't no use ? " inquired the old man snappishly.

" Cuz Cerity boun' to die, honey."

A spasm crossed his face.

" Cindy, ole woman, I ez tuckered. I'm gwine in de cabin. You stay out dyah ; " said he suddenly : " I "—tears rolled down his black cheeks and dropped in big splashes on his ragged shirt-front—" I ez clean tuckered."

The woman resumed her seat and commenced her sewing.

" Poor critter ! White folks say we's got no feelin's, but our hearts ez bustin' wide open. We ain't got nuttin' but Cerity, an' de Lord A'mighty gwine to tek her. Hi, who's dat ? "

" Only I, Cindy. Is Uncle Rufus in there ? "

" Heah ez me, Massa Bob," called out Rufus in a suspiciously low voice.

" I want you to saddle Sweetbrier, Lucille, and Tom," Bob said from the doorway. " How's Cerity, mammy ? "

" Pretty po'ly, pretty po'ly, Massa Bob, tank you," answered the woman. Then with sudden anguish, "It ez de dry heat."

“ Miss Boss is coming down to-night. She told me to tell Cerity so.”

The woman nodded her head.

“ I don’ tole her, seh.”

“ Hurry up, Rufus. The Boss is waiting on the porch.”

“ Yas, seh. I’z gwine torectly.”

It was five o’clock when they left the yard behind, and entered the avenue of pepper-trees. Around them was the magnificent beauty of a perfect summer-day. The Boss was in the centre. Bob and Lucius, scrupulously groomed, rode on each side, their horses’ coats shining like satin. The Boss, graceful and stately, sat her horse like one whose nerves and muscles were made of steel, and whose heart was as happy as her health was perfect. The white-duck riding-habit was buttoned close to her perfectly modeled chin ; while her thick wavy hair, surmounted by a white derby, was coiled tightly behind her small, flat ears. She made a singularly striking picture. Her white teeth gleamed in the sunlight as she watched the lot of trembling little pigs scattering, falling over each other, uncertain of their steps, anxious only to escape the prancing hoofs.

Bob regarded her for a moment, and then exclaimed—

“Boss, you look full of delicious opposites this afternoon. You seem to be made up of all sorts of harmonizing colors. Your eyes, hair, and complexion, none of them match, and yet the ensemble is perfect.”

The Boss blushed, half embarrassed.

“I wish you wouldn’t. I hate personalities, Bob.”

Before they reached the gate that shut off the Cameron lands from the road, they met a negro, whose sharp black face shone beneath his battered straw hat. An old linen duster flopped against his heels, and occasionally scraped the dust off some dirt-pile higher than the rest. The man bowed effusively in front of them.

“Hullo, Major ; doggone you, didn’t I tell you to come yesterday ? What do you mean, sir, by keeping me waiting a whole day ? ” cried Bob.

The negro looked distressed, as he shifted from one foot to the other, and fumbled uneasily with his hat-brim.

“Too bad ! I’ll have to go back,” said Bob disconsolately. “You all go on ; I

reckon I can catch up before you pass the post-office."

"Hadn't we better turn back too? I—" the Boss' face was full of trouble; "I'd just as soon."

"Nonsense—go right ahead! I'll not be long; besides, Lucius will take care of you. Won't you, old chap?"

Lucius laughed abruptly, and said: "I'll do my best."

The Boss still looked miserably perplexed.

"Are you sure?"

"Go on, dear. Wait for me, Major; we can talk as we go along. So long." He wheeled his horse about, and waved his cap in the air.

"Be as quick as you can," said the Boss over her shoulder.

Then those two rode slowly away, their horses casting one long shadow ahead of them.

An hour later they neared the church. It was choir-practising afternoon, and the notes of the organ floated through the gathering dusk. The lamps popping up in different houses gave an animation to the scene, intensely still before.

"Listen! They are singing 'Peace

on earth, good-will towards men." The voices rang out high and low, loud and soft. "What a simple melody, and yet how very sweet," said the Boss.

The twilight flitted through the branches of the trees, casting a shadow of the man's figure on the ground.

The Boss drew a deep breath, fixing, in reverence, her beautiful eyes upon the scene before her : the shabby, oblong little old church, with the flickering lights in the windows, the purple shades, the fading voices.

"I like this," she said, drawing her horse nearer to the other. "Don't you? Shake hands!" she cried, in her emotional, magnetic way; "I want to feel the touch of warm flesh."

Lucius caught her hand and crushed it passionately against his mouth.

The heavy-lidded gray eyes drooped toward the ground, and her head, with its tightly-pinned braids, fell low for a moment. The man went white to the lips.

"I didn't mean you to do that," said the Boss, with a forlorn smile. "I meant you to do just what I said, no more."

"Forgive me, dear," Lucius answered tenderly; "the longing lay so near my

lips, it would out. I scarcely knew what I was doing. I am a stupid fool."

Not finding anything else to say, the Boss asked :

"Has John Rusk got back?"

Lucius shook his head. "He is still at the Convention, poor old boy; but it wouldn't take him many hours to return, if he only knew who was waiting for him. He is one of the noblest men I know," said he, looking around at the Boss interrogatively, "but also the most miserable."

The Boss gazed at a point ahead of her in the road, and then gave a quick sigh.

"You see, he's loved her all her life," continued Lucius very slowly. "He has told me the whole story, how he used to beg the nurse to let him carry her; and one time, when he was in the middle of his sermon, he cut it short and pronounced the benediction, because he heard she was ill, and they had sent to the church for the doctor. I never saw such—I mean I never saw any greater devotion. Do you remember the day he planted the hyacinth upside down, because Meg happened to be within eye-range, and how sheepish he looked when he was discovered."

"Yes," said the Boss, looking up and smiling retrospectively ; "but it grew just the same, upside down though it was."

Lucius raised his eyebrows and laughed. "When Dick Brunswick heard of it, he said : 'John, I admire your pluck, but damn your judgment.' Strange," he continued more seriously, "that, with his sensitive, timid nature, he should possess such magnetism. I think it must be his utter forgetfulness of self, his exquisite kindness to each and every of God's creatures, and his great loyalty to his friends. It's his intense earnestness that gives weight to his simplest word, I think. That about describes him," Lucius finished abruptly, with an air of thoughtful judgment.

As he concluded, the Boss drew her horse nearer to him, and shivered a little, as if from cold.

"It's all very hard—very, very hard !" exclaimed the girl.

"What do you mean, dear ?"

"All of our lives—his, yours, and mine. I have spoiled yours, and—well—I reckon we are quits, mine—" She stopped tremulously, for a tragic tone had deepened the lines in her face.

“Finish, finish !” cried Lucius hoarsely, riding close beside her, and stretching out his hand as he shook her by the arm. “You mean—Boss, my Boss—say it, for Christ’s sake, say it—just once ! Oh, my girl ! I am in a frenzy. Don’t torture me any more. Look ! See how my hand is shaking ! I have strangled it down my throat so often. This time, honey, it has broken its bonds. Tell me, have you no pity ? Only once, honey, just once !”

The Boss was a true, loyal girl. She meant, she intended, to do right ; but the situation was too tragic, the suffering too intensely realistic on the white face of the man beside her.

Suddenly she forgot everything—forgot she was an affianced wife, forgot her pledged word, her noble old father. She was completely swamped in the whirlpool of his words.

“I love you, Lucius ; I never meant to tell it—never, never ! But I couldn’t keep it back. I do love you—oh, so—”

Lucius breathed a deep, prolonged “Ah—h ! and I have loved you so, Boss—Boss, my honey !”

The girl gave a piteous, appealing look at him.

“How poor and weak I am—poor and weak!” she moaned, dropping her head upon her breast.

“What a hideous shame it is that your father should make you act this cursed lie! Your father’s a fanatic on the subject of honor. Why, girl, it is ten thousand times more dishonorable to marry a man you don’t love—accept his caresses, eat his bread, bear his children—than to nobly acknowledge your fault. For God’s sake, are our lives to be ruined by the narrow prejudices of a biased mind?”

The Boss did not respond. She sat in the saddle, her head still lowered—that proud head, wearing the yoke of its own wrong-doing, as her breast heaved heavily.

Lucius watched her, his dark eyes brilliant with excitement.

“Boss, I scarcely dare to think.”

The girl raised her hand, as if to implore silence.

Lucius stretched out his hand, and somehow the ten fingers interwove and clung tightly together.

The sun had disappeared behind the hills, which were grand and deep azure, with jagged outlines. They rose close to the crimson west. The dogwood grew thicker,

and the perfume of honeysuckle was overpowering.

Just before they forded the creek at the foot of the hill and reined up to water their horses, the girl turned to the man.

“ I feel as Eve must have felt when they turned her out of Paradise, and she stood facing the unknown.”

“ You forget,” answered Lucius quickly, “ Adam went with her.”

“ That’s it—don’t you see ? ” exclaimed the Boss, her eyes filling. “ It is just that which makes the difference. I go alone. I take with me only the knowledge that I have been wrong and am miserable. I have been false to Bob, and he’s an angel. Oh ! Lucius, I feel so different, I dread everything to come. All seems changed ; even the sky doesn’t seem the same since this happened between you and me.”

Poor Boss, she felt engulfed in a mire of self-degradation. What would have only been the ordinary pastime of the conventional girl of society, to this wholesome country-bred Virginian seemed a crime. Certain words of her father’s were gnawing within her : they stabbed her with their truth.

“ You act within, my child—I’ll act

without ; and, by the grace of God, we will make you a perfect statue of a perfect woman."

"I am that, indeed," she thought, with bitter sarcasm.

She turned her sad eyes toward Lucius, who caught and clasped her hand and tried to kiss it ; but she tore it from him with a gesture superb yet pathetic.

"Don't."

Lucius, in his quick, impulsive way, grabbed the bridle of her horse and pulled the animal to a stop.

"You must not look at me like that. Boss, my girl, listen ;" and his voice rang out, magnificent and commanding. "Listen : I am not going to controvert your feelings, though I may condemn your ideas ; nor to influence your mind against your youthful teachings. You are only the mirror that bears the impression your father pictured there in your youth. I shall endeavor to work upon him, to show him the fearful consequences of a marriage without love. It means eternal regret for both of you. I want you to look at me. Look at me !" he demanded imperiously.

The exquisite face raised itself slowly, the lips white and trembling, the eyes

open wide with a strange, pathetic pleading in their gray depths.

“ Kiss me ! ”

The beautiful face of the girl grew ashen. She seemed bereft of motion ; the reins fell from the quivering fingers, and rested loosely upon the horse's neck.

“ Kiss me ! ”

The compelling power of the man flashed from beneath his brows. She turned her head, and held her mouth towards him with the lips parted.

Lucius gazed at her, his eyes dilated. Suddenly he jerked his head back. “ Take up your reins ! ” he cried hoarsely. “ Ride ahead ; the strain is killing me.”

Then he whispered to himself : “ Oh, Bob ! Bob ! Bob ! ”

Ten minutes later they had passed a teamster with a colt trotting beside him. He gave a lazy salute, then cracked his whip, and passed on his slow journey.

“ Race ! ” cried Lucius, giving his animal a sharp cut across its flank. It plunged forward, and the suddenness of the movement startled Sweetbrier, who was off like a shot. One minute more, and they were fairly in their stride.

"Come on!" shouted the Boss, her voice clear and ringing. Up hill—down hill—on one side a wheat field waving with spectre-like grain, on the other the sombre foliage of the woods; above, the purple sky fast fading into night.

Sweetbrier pressed on with extraordinary fury, the bay mare keeping close to her.

The girl's appearance was superb. Her eyes literally blazed with unconquerable spirit. The silk coat of the sorrel streamed with sweat. On—on! Up the long avenue—past the stables, neck and neck. At the gate, the bay mare swerved to the right; Sweetbrier saw the advantage and dashed in.

At the barn, over by the right, the silhouette of another rider appeared. It was Bob.

"Bully for you!" he cried, throwing his hat in the air enthusiastically. "That was a dandy run. Come in and get a snack; you look tuckered out. Come, 'Presch,' I'll make you a champagne cocktail."

"I am tired," she said. Her lips trembled, and her eyes were languid with

the light of one suffering from a deadly disease. "But it was glorious," she added.

Bob sent for ice, and drew the Boss towards the house.

"Rub the horses down well," said Lucius savagely, watching the retreating figures with gloomy, passionate eyes.

At the porch Bob looked back. They were standing in a solitary corner in the lamplight.

"I'll have one ready for you too, old chap. Hurry up!"

"I've got to change," replied Lucius, swinging towards his house, with long swift steps, as if to keep from saying something else.

CHAPTER VII.

It was after supper, and the Boss had not yet changed her riding-habit. She was standing in the doorway to enjoy the cool breeze, when she saw slouching towards her a queer-looking figure. It was Uncle Rufus. She watched him wonderingly. His head rested upon his breast, and his arms hung lifeless from his shoulders. An air of perfect dejection encompassed his whole being.

"What is it?" The Boss asked, as the man slackened his pace.

"Cerity, Missy." The bent form straightened for a moment, and the tired, black face showed a look of utter anguish. He twisted his poor black hands in despair, and whispered, "She ez dyin'!"

"No—no!" said the Boss hopelessly.

The old man shook his head feebly. All remaining life and energy seemed to have passed away.

"Dey want you over dyah, quick!"

“And the doctor?” asked the Boss rapidly, as she hurried along, her heart beating wildly.

“Marse Lucius done gone. He’ll be back heah d’rectly.”

“Always the first,” she thought exultingly—“always.”

Neither of them spoke again until they reached the cabin.

“She ez sort o’ still, Tiddy,” said his wife softly. “Honey,” she cried as she caught sight of the Boss, “she’s bin axin’ fur you.”

The Boss went over and sank down beside the low iron bed. She took the black hands in her own,—hands that looked like bone twisted with cord and covered with black parchment,—and laid her cheek against them.

Over in the corner stood a table upon which a lamp was burning faintly. Over the bed was a quilt of patch-work calico. Near the middle a dent showed the outlines of a frail figure, ending in a ridiculously small head covered with a white cloth. The face was cadaverous, for the dry, black skin exposed the smallest prominence of bone.

“Missy Boss, pappy git her,” whispered

Cerity, her breath ending in a faint groan.

"Here I am, Cerity dear," said the Boss, as tears rained down her cheeks.

It was her first sight of death. She was overpowered.

"Miss Boss, I ez gittin' mighty cole. Pappy !"

"Heah me, honey, kyarnt yo' see all we ?" he asked fearfully. "Mammy, turn de lamp up. Hit's so low Cerity kyarnt see we's."

"Where's Mammy ?" The hollow eyes opened wide. They held that strange, inquisitive look of the dying. "Meh old mammy, git Miss Boss to sing 'I want to be a'—" The girl stopped ; she was bleeding internally, and her lungs were almost stopped up.

"I know, I understand," whispered the Boss brokenly. She reached out towards the withered hand of the old man, and interwove his fingers in Cerity's. "She wants you to hold it." Rufus bent his quivering lips and kissed the passive arm.

Mammy wiped the cold forehead, damp with the sweat of death. The Boss with bent head began to sing, the signs of deep

grief in her beautiful eyes. Gradually, the look of pain gave place to one of dreamy quietude. The claw-like hands moved, and clung firmer to those of the old man. The eyes for a moment dispelled the film that seemed to be shutting out the sights of earth. The little black face grew soft.

"Miss Boss, yo' ez bu'ful. Will de angels all look like yo'? De ones sot down in de book do. Mammy, don' you fuss wid pappy no mo'; will you promise?"

"Gord A'mighty, I never meant nuttin'," muttered the old woman humbly.

Uncle Rufus bent over and lifted the misshapen little body in his arms, as her head rested weakly against his neck.

"He tinks I ez spun-glass," she said, feebly smiling, and stretching out her hand towards the Boss.

"Whar' ez Marse Lucius? Oh, whar' ez Marse Lucius?"

"Here I am, Cerity. The doctor's gone to Scotsville," Lucius explained in a whisper to the Boss, as he crossed over to the other side of the bed and dropped his hat on the floor.

"Marse Lucius, yo' an' Miss Boss, yo' mus' tek' care of her. Yo' heah, sir?"

"Trust me, Cerity," bending his mouth close to the black face. "I love her."

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" she cried out joyously, her sudden animation contrasting strangely with her past weakness.

"Pray, pappy, I ez gwine to glory, quick."

The Boss crept away and knelt in the doorway.

Lucius bent over and put a tiny bit of ice between the cracked and bleeding lips, and then motioned to the old man to commence the prayer.

Mammy crouched on the floor, her head curled up in the quilt. Dry sobs shook her immense shoulders.

Rufus began in trembling tones: "Gord A'mighty, heah dis po' critter prayin' fur his lamb, his lamb—" He stopped short. "Massa Lucius, I kyarnt do it nohow," he sobbed.

Lucius glanced up. The Boss' eyes turned to the bed, her face growing as white as a calla-lily. Then folding her two hands mechanically, she began: "Our Father," she whispered, in a low, unsteady voice. Lucius' eyes followed her lips intently. Presently his too began to move, "Thy will be done—"

Slowly the feeble voice of the old man joined in : "Lead us not into temptation. Amen."

"Now I lay me—" whispered the dying girl ; then her eyes closed as the childish prayer crept over the lips of the grown folks.

"Mammy, Pappy, Miss Boss, Massa Lucius, I ez waitin' in glory ; come in de mawnin', sho'."

The Boss moved close to the bedside.

"Is this death ?" she shuddered.

The man reached out and clasped her hand in his living, warm grasp.

"Yes."

With the other hand the Boss stooped over and stroked the stiffening fingers. The white face looked down into the black one. The grand eyes of the living gazed deep into those of the dying. The Boss tried to speak—to say good-bye ; but it was impossible. Her tongue was swollen and parched.

Suddenly the breathing ceased ; then the black eyes stared straight ahead of them, sightless. The body was dead.

Lucius reached out and shut tight the lids, tenderly lifting the dead girl from the old man's arms and placing it back among

the pillows. Such a puny little creature, like a feather-weight ! Over in the dark corner Cindy and Rufus sat with their arms twined about each other, the shrunken figure of the old man lost in the ponderous embrace of the woman.

“ O God ! God ! ” said the Boss, in a deep thrilling voice, “ this is terrible.” She took her cambric handkerchief out of her pocket and covered the still face ; then she crept away to the doorway and looked at the moon.

“ I will ride down to Warren and telegraph for an undertaker,” said Lucius, close to her shoulder. “ Who will do the rest ? ”

Quickly the beautiful, sad eyes opened wide.

“ I shall ; I shall wash and dress her myself,” she said, looking back into the room. “ Certy was my foster-sister, you know ; we nursed at the same breast.” Then she sat down trembling, and covered her face with her hands, the heavy drops trickling through her fingers.

The night had grown hours older. Lucius had returned from his sad mission, and sat in a low chair beside the dead.

At the foot of the bed knelt Rufus, his

face crushed in the quilt. On a chair in the shadow, with her apron thrown over her head, Cindy rocked, back and forth, in a low frenzy. Low words of grief came mumbling across her lips. On the doorsteps, her chin resting in the palm of her hand, her back against the woodwork of the door, crouched the Boss. She listened to the low voice of the woman in the cabin, and to the buzzing of the locusts outside. Dawn found them there. As the sun rose and the deep shadows gave place to certainty, the girl got up stiffly from the doorstep and went inside.

“Come,” she said to Lucius, “you must have some coffee. I’ll change my habit and be right back.” Then she drew the apron down from Cindy’s face and kissed the wet cheek.

“Don’t, Mammy—Cerity’s so happy ! Come and see her—she looks so nice in her white dress ; it’s the one she used to beg me to wear. She’ll be glad to have it on, I think.”

In ten minutes Lucius had built a fire in the deserted kitchen.

“Boil the water,” said the Boss briefly, as she rolled up the sleeves of her habit and beat the coffee in a mortar.

“ Ah ! It smells so good, we must make a pot and carry it over to mammy and Uncle Rufus.”

“ As soon as you have finished, you must go and lie down and try to get a little sleep,” said Lucius. Suddenly he lifted the pot from the fire, saying : “ You can trust me to look after things.”

The two drained their cups to the dregs in silence. Then the Boss, quite worn out by the night's vigil, crept upstairs to her room, while Lucius went back to the silent cabin, with the hot, steaming coffee-pot in his hands.

Warren paid its final tribute to poor little Cerity. A large number of blacks, with the folks from the homestead, gathered together for a last look upon the face of the girl they all had known so intimately in life. Lucius and Bob were the pall-bearers. The Boss walked between Mammy and Uncle Rufus.

With wonderful tenderness the narrow coffin was laid to rest on the top of the hill, beneath gay flowering-plants. Mammy was helpless with grief. Rufus watched every movement of the coffin with a long, wistful gaze. There was a throe of anguish in every heave of his breast. He gave a

long, shuddering sigh as the box was fitted into its narrow space and the sod dropped upon it. A tear rolled down his face and mingled with the earth that covered little Cerity.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE silence of a sultry twilight was upon the land as Lucius walked out upon the balcony. He shaded his eyes with his hand, as though still blinded from the light in the dining-room.

"Colonel ! Oh, there you are," he said, as he saw a slight glow from the Colonel's pipe. "I should like a few words with you, sir."

"Private !"

"Yes, sir."

"All hunky, lad."

Just then there was a soft step on the boards of the piazza, and the Boss walked up. She was dressed in a smooth, black gown, out of deference to Cerity. About her skirt hung sprigs and bits of green leaves, and she carried a straggling vine in her hand. To the soft wool of her frock thorns had attached themselves. She looked very beautiful.

"Po-pa—I want—" she commenced with

saddened slowness ; then stopped, as she saw her father and Lucius were close together. She was about to pass on into the house without finishing her sentence, but her father uncrossed his feet from the railing, dropped his chair, and called out :

“ Where have you been, daughter ? ”

Then she came towards him.

“ Over yonder in the cemetery, Po-pa. Mammy and I were dressing Cerity’s grave.”

The girl turned her soft, deep, lustrous eyes into the purple twilight, where she could see in the distance the white stones. There was a rich depth of moisture in her voice.

Lucius stared at her willowy body curved forward, and felt his heart beat rapidly. His whole soul thrilled with a tremulous happiness that overwhelmed him.

The Colonel emitted a dry cough and crinkled up his eyes ; then, with an unconscious sigh, he tried to light his pipe, which was already burning brightly.

“ You look like your mother to-night, Boss,” he said huskily. “ It must be all that blackness against your white face.”

"Yes, do go and take it off," said Lucius abruptly.

"Is it so awfully unbecoming?" asked the girl, in her sincere manner. "It might hurt dear old Mammy, if I went around in colors. Po-pa, I want a stone for Cerity's grave—a big fine one, with—"

"I've ordered a stone already from Richmond," answered Lucius. Then he frowned at the landscape, as though afraid she might thank him. "I received a wire to-day saying it will be down Tuesday, on the noon train."

The Boss went over and took him by the hand.

"That was so good of you," she said gently. Then, unable to say more, she turned and walked rapidly to the doorway leading into the house. She paused a moment on the sill, and a whisper crept through the stillness:—"You are always good, Lucius." Then she was gone.

"If you want to talk to me, my boy, reckon we will find it cooler on the lawn," the Colonel said softly. He jumped up from his chair and wiped the perspiration trickling down his brow.

"Whew! it's a ripping, tearing night. It's hot as the mischief."

“All right, sir—just a minute. I want to fetch a match. Oh! Ah! Thanks!” Puff—puff—now—puff—puff— “I’m ready.”

“He’s in some trouble,” the Colonel mused thoughtfully. “Nothing to his discredit, though; I’ll wager.” He linked his arm in Lucius’ and led him to the summer-house. “Well, lad?”

Lucius remained silent for a couple of seconds, pulling heavily at his cigar, but his impenetrable face gave no clew to his thoughts. The tone of that rich, modulated voice, with its perceptible Southern inflection, still clung to his ears. Suddenly he pulled himself together, and made a forlorn attempt to smile.

“I am in trouble, Colonel—heart trouble,” he added in a low voice.

The Colonel pushed his palmetto hat to the back of his head.

“Bless my soul, that’s the cussedest sort of an ache,” the elder man answered gravely. “It hurts hardest and stays by you the longest. Who is she?”

“The Boss!”

The Colonel’s face glowed. He half put out his hand, but drew it back again. A look of pain filled his eyes.

"This is worse than I thought—much, much worse. How long has it been?"

"Since I first set eyes on her, I reckon."

"Too bad!"—the Colonel was silent a minute—"too bad! You have hurt me—you have hurt me! Of course you know the Boss' honor as well as my own is irrevocably pledged, both to the dead, my sister Patsy, also to the living, her son. If things had been otherwise, my boy, it would have given me great happiness to have welcomed you into the family. As it is," he continued, in his low, winning voice, "as it is, we are bound by our word, though her heart should break. Thank God!" he said abruptly, "there is no chance of that. She couldn't recall her word: 'Honor first' is the motto of the Camerons." Then his eagle eyes flashed and the grand head reared itself proudly.

"But, Colonel, if she doesn't love Bob, would you let her sacrifice her—"

"Stop!" exclaimed the Colonel haughtily; "there is no question of that. The Boss has pledged her word, I tell you. She is a Cameron."

Suddenly he turned full upon Lucius, devouring his white face with his piercing gaze.

“ She knows nothing of this, of course ? ”

Lucius looked him in the eyes, never flinching.

“ I have told her, sir.”

The Colonel drew his upper lip back against his dry teeth.

“ You coward ! ” he thundered. “ You damned coward ! ”

Lucius faced the older man, his eyes ablaze and pallid as death. His hand opened and shut with fury. He turned around blindly, as if to beat down a lion with his fist, but opened it immediately and spread wide the fingers.

“ You are protected, sir—your age. Besides, you are her father,” he stammered.

The Colonel gasped. He was terrible—terrible in his great wrath. Then he said :

“ A poor excuse. Like a slimy snake, you crawl into a man’s house under the guise of friendship and infest it with your poisonous breath ; then deny the only satisfaction possible. Thank God, your father died before this day ! John Strange was a gentleman.”

Lucius blushed deeply, then turned pale. The cold drops of perspiration in the roots

of his hair ran down his white brow. The shot had told.

He bowed his head before the other, who stood there like an aroused tiger.

"Good God ! hear me," exclaimed Lucius hoarsely. "I tried to down the temptation. It was irresistible. It overwhelmed me. One day I told her—I couldn't help it—that sounds unmanly to you—but it's God's own truth. If you ever loved her mother—you say she looked like her—then you may know in part something of my sufferings."

The Colonel regarded him in silence for some seconds, with a strange expression on his face.

"And does she love you ?" he asked with difficulty.

"I am afraid so, sir. Yes."

"God ! My Boss—my Boss—my own little girl !" Every trace of anger had faded from his face ; only a depth of sorrow showed itself. "You spoke of her mother, man ; you did well to remind me. It has softened my heart as nothing else would have done. I have it half in my mind to forgive you. The situation, though, is the same—only more tragic. We must keep our word and hide our heart-ache.

There is only one thing to be done — you must go away at once. My words may sound severe — maybe they are. You brought it on yourself, though, lad — brought it on yourself. I would dig my girl's grave with my own two hands rather than have her break her word."

The old man's face looked resplendent. His voice grew sweet and low, and almost broke into a sob, as he whispered, "Gertrude, my wife, we need you, the Boss and I."

Lucius looked at him helplessly.

"I'll go, sir—to-morrow early. I will never trouble you any more. I think it best I should not see the Boss again ; in time she will forget. I won't tell any one where I am going—not even Bob." He winced. "I don't want any one to know. I will go away quietly, and no one will be the wiser. I'll go and pack now, sir. I feel bewildered and stupid. Will you—" he hesitated, half stretched out his hand, and then waited — "will you shake hands?"

The Colonel looked at him steadily ; then slowly put out his fine, long hand, with fingers that looked like the Boss'. Lucius grasped it firmly.

"Thank you, sir. You will never regret it—never ! "

While the Colonel and Lucius were over in the summer-house, the Boss sat on the steps leading into Mammy's cabin. One arm rested across Cindy's lap; her long hair had fallen about her shoulders, and trailed on the white dovetailed floor. Inside the cabin the candles had been lighted; outside, the odor of cedar and pine - cones filled the air.

"O Mammy! Mammy," the Boss cried, with hands clasped hard. "I am so tired!"

"Ez yo', honey?" the old woman said gently. "Yo' walked too fur. Lemme rub yo' haid; I'll sen' de mis'ry to de debbil."

The Boss laid her cool, pale cheek against the homespun apron, while the yellow-palmed hands, with perfect tapering fingers, moved to and fro, like huge cushions.

"That's it, Mammy—that's heavenly! So! Oh, I am tired all through; I ache from my head to my heels." She opened her eyes and then stared at the stars, saying: "I wonder if Certy's up there."

"Sho', honey. She don' lef' we's in de

darkness, but she don' fix herse'f in Aberham's busom. She ez one ob dem lights up dyah now."

"Where's Uncle Rufus?" the Boss asked presently.

"Dunno, honey. He dun teck all de heart out o' me, he kyahn't git no res' sense Cerity's don' gone. All night yo' kyahn heah him cryin'. He jes' seems to be gittin' older an' older ; his eyes ez gettin' dat wistful, like he's seein fur off—po' Tiddy boy !" Mammy sopped her wet eyes with a frayed corner of her apron.

"Don't cry," whispered the Boss, softly, "don't cry."

"I ain', honey, I ain'. I ez jes' grevin'."

"Mammy," said the Boss, lying back silent, with closed eyes, and thoughts drifting languidly without effort, "tell me a story."

A slight breeze had sprung up. The candles flickered unsteadily. Then one by one they went out. Mammy reflected.

"Shet yo' eyes, my lamb—lemme tink. Did I uver tell yo' 'bout Nancy Pike ? Dat po' critter ! I never gwine forgit dat gal—nuver !"

The Boss made the sign "No," with her head. She was thinking of her downy bed,

and the cool freshness of the white sheets. Mammy began in a deep voice that came from her throat.

“ Nancy Pike wuz a beauty ; she sut’n’y wuz. She had gret, sorf’ black eyes like sloes, an’ her skin wuz de color o’ yaller roses. Her hyah wuz straight an’ black as nite, jes’ befo day come, an’ her figger wuz plump an’ impident like. I tell yo’ she wuz a mighty sprightly young gal. Ez I too rough, honey ? Meh ole black han’s feel like saws.”

“ No, Mammy ; go on, please.”

The old woman continued : “ Marse Hull owned two black niggers, dat wuz used fur to tote in de wood fur de big house. One wuz name’ Pete, uver he wuz name’ Jim ; an’ dey bof wuz cotin’ Nancy, an’ bof wuz monstrous fond o’ each uver. Befo’ Gord, dat nigger wuz jis’ projectin’ ; she dunno which she liked mos’, Pete nor Jim. Bimeby, she ax dem to come to some o’gree-ment ; but it seem like dey dunno, caws dey bof loved her mightierly, an’ dey couldn’t ’sent to gib her up. At the same time, dey wuz so true to each uver dat nuver would teck her widout de uver said so. Dey was mos’ ’stracted, an’ would groan at nite an’ cry out. ’Twuz torment,

sho' nuf." Mammy stopped for breath and then went on, in a slow, low voice : " Well, bimeby, dey had a talk in de corner yard ober by de fence. Dey ax her to teck a walk, an' she say, 'Sut'n'y.' Her voice wuz so sorf an' low an' sweet dey mighty nigh run away ; but when dey got her out dyah in de woods, whar de ole coon lives an' whar no one could heah her cry out, dey beat her in de haid wid an ax dat dey used fur choppin' wood. She drag like a lump o' lead. Den dey fell down an' kissed her an' cried an' beat dey bres' an' say, 'Gord, heah we's !' Den in a minute, ' Whack—whack '—an' dey don' sen dey black souls to hell. Honey, yo' ain' listenin'."

The end of the story was unheard by the Boss. Her sense of hearing was lost, for she had sunk to slumber beneath the touch of Mammy's fingers.

CHAPTER IX.

LUCIUS sat alone in his room late that night. He had taken up his gun, suddenly drawn it to his shoulder and sighted an imaginary object. His big body shivered, however, and he missed his aim. After a moment he walked over and stood it up in the corner, behind the door. Then he trimmed the lamp with a pair of rusty pocket-scissors, and from a drawer in the table drew out pen, ink, and paper. He commenced to write :

“ I am going away, and am writing now to say good-bye, dear little girl. To-night, in the summer-house, your father ordered me off the plantation, and used words that beat like blows upon my soul. He spoke of my father—they were sword-cuts every sentence. Perhaps I deserved them—God knows. Anyhow, I am going away—that’s the point between you and me. I start in the morning early—an hour before you will have opened your eyes. I know

the time exactly. For five years I have watched you come to the window, with that beautiful exhaustion still clinging to you from your warm sleep, my girl—dear, dear girl !

“ I shall do a little traveling ; perhaps take up some of my old studies—not many just yet. Some day, you may hear of me as a lawyer. You wanted me to be something. I’ll try, for your sake. I loved you patiently at first ; but just toward the last, honey, I felt I had to give some sign. Now I am to lose you altogether. How I shall miss you ! Every day—almost every hour—during the past five years, I had only to walk from this room to the big house to find you. From to-night, you will be at one end of the world—I at the other. The world is such a big place—and cruel, too !

“ I wonder if you know how you have filled every crevice in my heart, until there is no room for anything else but misery ? Of course you do ! Didn’t we talk it over that day of the race ? My girl ! My body feels languid and listless to-night, and my brain stupid. Boss, after your father spoke to me, I came into my room and shut the door ; for I couldn’t trust myself

to see you again. I threw myself on the bed and fell to weeping desperately. It's a long, long time since I wept—not since you had diphtheria, and the doctor said you might die. I cried that night, but nobody knew it. Afterwards I slept. When I awoke I felt like an old, old man, pinched and old. The remembrance of that talk with your father to-night is like a bad dream.

“ My girl, this letter is getting too sad ; it is high time I cut it short. Three words more : God bless you !

LUCIUS.

“ P.S. I have your glove—the one you dropped from the big window in the hall. It is pink and has six buttons.”

He signed and folded the letter he had finished, and addressed it in a firm, large hand. Then he drew a pin from the lapel of his coat and stuck it through the envelope. He glanced around him helplessly and rubbed his head. Then, fired with sudden inspiration, he fastened it to the edge of the bureau.

“ They will see it after I am gone,” he said, and mechanically busied himself in

sorting the heterogeneous mass of rackets, broken masks, rusty foils, game-bags, boxing-gloves, etc.

Without warning, the littered floor swam and plunged before him. Then it disappeared altogether, and he sat down and groped about him helplessly, as all the blood in his big body seemed to be thundering at his brain, and the veins beat like whipcords in his throat.

"I shall go clean crazy if this strain lasts," he murmured to himself.

His lips quivered, and finally stiffened, while his strong brown fingers met over the knuckles and interlocked. Then the fingers crept to the eyelids. His eyes felt like balls of living fire.

Suddenly he heard the passing of feet upon the grass. He leaned upon one elbow and listened. The sound died away. Then it returned from the other side of the house. With the gaze of a trapped deer, he fixed his eyes upon the window. The cold drops stood upon his forehead, and he could see his breast rise and fall.

"Boss ! It's she !" he muttered, with an inexpressible sickening of the heart.

A tall, white figure stood in bas-relief against the night. It was the Boss. She

laid one bare arm against the lintel of the window, her face as white as his.

"You?"

"Yes, I."

Lucius stumbled to his feet and moved backwards with outstretched palms.

A faint breeze lifted a lock of the girl's copper-colored hair. Behind her, the black night was unbroken.

"You! You! O Boss! you should have spared me." There was deep misery in his voice.

The Boss' arms moved once towards him. Then she cast down her eyes and shuddered.

"I have just heard you were going away. Mammy told me." She spoke slowly, as if every word were an effort. "If you are going away, if we are to part forever, we can at least say farewell! I don't think even Po-pa could be cruel enough to prevent that."

Lucius groaned.

She stretched out her arms towards him.

"Help me up."

With a strong effort, as though against his will, Lucius moved slowly in her direction.

"Hurry!"

Then he put his arms out and lifted her on to the sill, saying under his breath, "Boss, why did you do this?" She looked past him into the lighted room.

"You would have left without one word—one single word!"

He pointed to the note pinned to the edge of the bureau. "I wrote," he said hoarsely.

The Boss slipped down from the sill and touched the carpet with her little toes. Lucius noticed her gown was damp around the hem from the night dew.

"Give it to me," she said, with a pathetic gesture. She took the note, and held it at a little distance between her finger and thumb.

"It's thick."

Then she placed it in the bosom of her dress.

"Lucius," she said in her low, mellow voice, "I've come to talk to you and to listen to you."

"Boss, I beg of you to go, dear. Oh, girl! you will ruin me completely!" Then he caught her hand and held it tight with a gentle rudeness. "Go, before I become an infernal coward again!"

The girl shook her head.

"I could not let you leave," she said huskily, "without seeing you." At the same time she lifted her eyes and met his stern face bravely. "You might as well be civil to me," she continued, placing her two hands, one upon the other, over her breast, "for I mean to stay my time."

Lucius turned with a sigh to the lamp on the table.

It flickered unsteadily ; he blew it out. Then he struck a match on the sole of his shoe, and held it high above his head.

"What are you looking for?"

"The student's lamp. Oh, I see it! It's over on the bureau."

"Why did you blow out that light before you found the other lamp?" asked the girl wonderingly.

Lucius opened wide his eyes. "Why—why—" he stammered, looking helplessly back at her. "I don't know—I am losing my brain."

There was a long stretch of silence ; then the Boss picked up a disjointed gun.

"Let me help you pack. May I?"

As she glanced up, she caught Lucius' burning eyes fastened upon her.

"Lucius—Lucius!" she cried, all the

forced calmness gone, a wild animation filling her eyes, " don't leave me ! "

Lucius stood opposite her, and was about to move backwards again, his face pinched with pain, when a sudden tremor ran through him.

" Lucius ! " piteously cried the Boss.

Her voice mastered him, and he sank upon his knees putting his arms about her. He placed his throbbing head against her bodice, and they both burst into tears.

For ten minutes there was no sound, except the duet of sobbing. Then he arose slowly. Boss stumbled back against the table, which was on castors ; it tipped and rolled off to one corner.

" Take care ! "

Lucius sprang forward and caught her in his arms. Motionless, with hushed breathing, they stared at each other.

" Boss ! "

" Lucius ! "

" My beautiful twin stars ! " said he, gently closing her eyes with kisses and stroking her hair, so tenderly, so tenderly. " Oh ! if you only belonged to me—alone—mine—for time and eternity—through life and death—my girl—oh, my

girl ! God ! God ! ” he cried, fondling her lovely little fingers. “ She’s mine, heart, soul and body—every bit of her, and I’ve got to give her up.” He laid his white face against her still whiter one. “ Core of my heart—my soul—mine—mine ! ” He held her two hands clasped tightly in his.

From time to time, they lifted their heads and looked at each other. He had drawn her to the window. The moonlight shone upon her white dress, as she leaned over against him, in her softness and suppleness.

A great silence made itself felt. Over in the big house a loud-sounding clock hurriedly struck the hour of three.

“ The time to say good-bye has come,” Lucius murmured.

The girl folded her hands and then closed her eyes, as if to shut out a stinging pain.

“ Must I go ? ”

“ Yes, my girl.”

She started and stared at him with wide-open eyes.

“ It is for always,” she said. “ O Lucius ! I cannot.” She lifted her lips and caressed the hungry, deep lines drawn

about his mouth, murmuring brokenly, "O, my dear ! take me with you. Lucius,—I mean to be strong ; but how can I, with the pain in your great eyes looking at me ? I am speaking from my soul—not from my lips. I have suffered so much, and kept it back so long. It was hard to keep away from you, dear. I did not want to break my word to Bob—poor Bob ! I prayed night and day, but the prayers did not work. My love only deepened, until to-night, when I heard you were going, I felt I could face death and disgrace—anything, only I must get to you ! Don't you hear me, Lucius ?

The man started. His limbs trembled.

"I hear you," he replied slowly. "I too have prayed. To-night your father called me a coward. Dear, I beg you to go—it will soon be light." There was a purple glow just visible on the hill-tops. "You must go at once. If I were to take you with me, you would hate me in a year. I know you, with your exaggerated ideas of honor. Respect would not cement our love. You are your father's own daughter, and he is a fanatic on the subject, and has instilled into you his principle—a hyperbolical principle. It's bred

in your bone—part of you. God ! I could bear anything but your hatred.”

“ Hush ! ” said the Boss ; “ it’s over. I am going.”

“ Kiss me.”

When he had kissed her once she held her mouth close up to him that he might kiss it again.

“ Good-bye, girl ! Christ watch over you.” He stretched his hands yearningly over her head and gave an instinctive benediction. She moved towards the door gropingly ; her long strands of hair hung about her shoulders and her dress trailed behind her, crumpled and soiled.

The man watched her, anguish smouldering in his eyes. Then suddenly he felt weary—oh, so weary !

As she reached the door she turned and waved her hand back at him. The clock struck four.

Lucius staggered after her, as if to call her back ; then he sank against the closed door. He lay there for an hour—in a deathlike, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER X.

Two hours later, the roaring of many voices roused the Boss from an exhausted sleep.

Starting off the bed, where she had thrown herself in her crumpled gown, with excited pulses she ran to the window and looked down upon a farrage of men, women and children. It seemed as though the yard could not hold the crowd ; fighting, cursing, scrambling, they reached the gate.

She swung about and faced Cinders, just entering the room. The black woman's hands were shaking, and her eyeballs bulged out with horror.

"What—what is it ?" asked the Boss, pointing with tragic finger to the window.

"Gord ! Gord A'mighty ! Mr. Owen don' been kill ; an' dey say Massa Lucius shot him."

The Boss' face blanched white, and her superb gray eyes flashed back at Cinders from beneath her drawn brows.

"Who dared to say that of him?"

"Don' look like dat, meh lamb. Don' do it," pleaded Cinders brokenly.

"Answer me!" she cried, her gaze fastened upon the window.

"Ebrybody—de whole village, an' part o' Buckingham, ez down dar," Cinders said under her breath.

"White-livered skunk!" to kill a man on his own ground, floated up from below. The Boss unconsciously muttered the words which the chorus was roaring outside. Then, with trembling fingers, she began to pile up her hair. She went to the closet and took a large black cloak from a peg and threw it about her, hiding her disarranged costume.

Outside she found her father over by the fence. Close to him were two men, one of his own age, sharp-featured and senile of face, in whom she recognized the sheriff. He was trying to assume an air of indifference, while from his long, skeleton-like fingers were suspended a pair of handcuffs.

The human wall wavered perceptibly as she appeared, and greeted her with a hoarse murmur.

"What is the matter, Po-pa?" the Boss

asked, trying to still her heart's pulsation. "What are these people doing in our yard?"

The sheriff cleared his throat, and made a movement as if about to speak.

The Colonel put up his hand, with a quick, decisive motion.

"Stop!" His eyes narrowed and glowed like a panther's. "These dogs"—his voice trembled with suppressed fury—"have dared to enter my grounds unasked. They say Bill Owen was found murdered in his corn-field. Of course, we are sorry; but what in hell has that got to do with us? Damn the whole lot of them!"

The sheriff shook his head.

"Lem me say har word atopper yourn's, Colonel."

"Silence!" thundered the Colonel, a terrible light of anger shining in his face. The sheriff frowned and gnawed his lips.

The Boss turned away. Over in the corner she caught sight of Lucius, who was facing the crowd like a leader of men. His figure was drawn to its full height, and a look of calm, serene dignity was upon his face.

The Boss stared dully at him, her bizarre mind growing luminous with ad-

miration. Close beside him, so as to defend him if necessary, was Bob. He was in his shirt-sleeves. One sleeve, rolled up, showed a magnificent development of arm and shoulder ; the joy of a fight lighted up his languid eyes.

The Boss continued to stare. She was trying to realize this terrible thing.

A greasy, sore-eyed negro boy, no higher than a boot, and the color of coal-dust, with ragged trousers hitched over his dilapidated shoes, glanced up at her drawn, set face, and turned away muttering : " De Lawd hev mussy ! "

Lucius was speaking in a voice that seemed to fill the whole earth with its presence. A superb, commanding manner was upon him now ; and he was talking with a power that conquers, absorbing the attention of the crowd by the sheer force of his wonderful magnetism.

" My men, I am here ; what do you want of me ? "

A low, indistinct mumbling of the throng was the only answer.

Lucius' voice rang out again :

" You are most of you well acquainted with me, and my claim to the title of an honorable man."

Before the Boss' eyes rose a mist, and she could scarcely see Lucius' figure.

"You have accused me of a horrible crime—a dirty, cowardly action. The only evidence against me is—you found my gun in the same field with the murdered man. Supposing I were to tell you that my gun was stolen from me over a week ago."

"Prove it, Mister, prove it!" hissed the sneering voices.

Lucius crossed his arms. The mob pressed more closely to him.

"I can and will—only man to man. I insist upon time. You have put upon my shoulders the burden of a coward. You are trying to poison your minds against me. All at once you hate me ; you clamor for my blood ; you have told me what I am. Very well, let me tell you what you are. You are a lot of simple folks, blinded by false sentiment—a sentiment that is as cowardly as it is illegitimate. I am looking you straight in the eyes—I deny any knowledge of this murder. Absolutely defenceless I stand here. I don't believe there is a cur among you mean enough to shoot an unarmed man. If there is, let him show his sneaking face.

“ Well ? ”

There was not a movement, except the surreptitious lowering of stones and putting away of pistols.

“ You have come to arrest me. I am ready. I invite you to follow me to the jail.”

He gazed fixedly at the throng, and then curled his lip.

“ What ? You won't go ? Then to hell with you ! do you hear ? ” He turned to Bob. “ Put on your coat,” he said, in his usual voice. “ There won't be any fight to day.”

This intrepid manner had awed the brutes as nothing else could have done. The Boss made her way to him, without any distinct idea of what she was going to say.

Before he was aware of her presence, a pair of beautiful but despairing hands seized him. He started violently, and his dark face flushed as he looked at her with a curious gleam in his eyes.

“ What do you think of it ? ”

“ As long as they didn't attack you,” she said, with a sudden wildness in her voice, “ it's all right. You can easily tell them I was with you at the time. I can be a witness.”

"Boss! Not a word—not a word—to any one, mind." He spoke with strong emphasis.

"But," she said in a passionate, loud whisper.

Lucius' eyes grew stern and grave.

"There are no buts. Promise me."

The Boss folded her arms resolutely.

"I will not promise. I would be a coward," she said, looking straight up at him, her gray eyes full of determination. Lucius gazed back at her, with deep black shadows under his eyes.

"Boss," he said slowly, pausing between each word, as though to make them more impressive, "at least give me your word, as a woman to a man, that you will say nothing until I give you leave. It will blow over in a day or two, the right man is sure to turn up. It's only a matter of a few hours—a day at the most. By keeping quiet, Boss, you save your father's heart from breaking," the girl winced—"and Bob's happiness. Promise me, dear—promise!"

"I—c—c—can't."

"Promise!"

The Boss thought for a second, with eyes fixed, and arms hanging by her side.

"I will promise you this much : I will send you word if I find I must speak."

"I"—Lucius tried twice before he could answer—"thank you." Then he turned away as if to go, but suddenly bethought himself and turned back, took her hand and pressed it quickly.

"Good-bye."

The Boss stood where he had left her, with closed fists pressed against her breast, to still the furious beating of her heart.

Without so much as a glance at the menacing faces around him, Lucius walked over to where Rufus, with trembling fingers, held the bridle of his horse. The old man seemed to be utterly broken by grief ; the sweat of apprehension covered his face. His bloodshot eyes and quivering lips told of his misery.

"Don't look so depressed, Uncle Rufus."

"Sah ?"

"I said cheer up ; it will all come right."

"I dunno. Yo' kyant tell, Massa ; yo' kyant tell."

"You'll see."

Lucius deliberately put one foot into the stirrup and leaped into the saddle.

Bob, who had disappeared behind the

house for a moment, returned hurriedly and whispered :

“These drunken fools are muttering something about holding you up in the road. “It’s the Colonel, you and I against these black devils ; how many guns have you ?”

Lucius looked surprised.

“None.”

“I’ll step into your room and bring all I can find. Keep a sharp eye in your head. I don’t like that damned sheriff. Ride on a pace, and I’ll catch up.”

Before any one was aware of it, Bob crossed the yard and whispered instructions into the Colonel’s ear. Turning toward the cottage, he stumbled against the figure of a negro, crouching on his hands and knees.

“Out of my way, you black beast, or I’ll blow a hole clean through you !” he yelled, the drawl all gone from his voice, and his languid manner changed into the fierceness of a lion.

Over by the gate Lucius sat his horse like a soldier, a tumult of thought behind his massive brow.

“Come on !” he cried, with a gesture of impatience. He took off his hat, and

made a low, sweeping bow to the Boss ; then like a general at the head of his troops, put spurs to his horse and galloped away.

With sudden action the crowd took up and followed him.

The Boss stood hearkening, her lips white. A man screamed, " Give him a rope cravat ! " A hideous shriek of delight greeted the words.

Bob dashed out of the cottage, a gun in each hand.

" Where's my horse ? " he shouted desperately. Quick as a flash he grabbed the bridle and flung himself into the saddle.

In a second the yard, that had been swarming with figures, was deserted, save by one, the Boss.

She stood there, a pallid image of helplessness. Her eyes grown huge with terror, and with a wild gasp she wheeled half around and covered her face with her hands. Then she fell upon the ground, as if she had received a blow over the heart.

Like a stroke of lightning something flashed through her brain : " I will follow him ! "

She gathered up her long skirts, grabbing her cloak, which had come undone. There was a quick swish of drapery over

the grass, and the gleam of a terrified pallid face, and the Boss had clasped her fair white hands under the "Brier's" belly and fastened the girths.

"Dear God, save him ! Save him !" she whispered hoarsely. A gleaming white arm reached for the bridle, and the girl vaulted into the saddle.

Bang ! Bang !

"Dear God, save him ! Save him ! Save him !"

She saw figures dart away—dodge ; then rally again.

Bang ! Bang ! Bang !

On, on she galloped, Sweetbrier gaining by her terrific speed. Suddenly, there was a howl from the blacks crowding after him.

Bang ! Bang ! Bang ?

Then she saw them all in wild confusion. Some of the blacks had thrown themselves upon the ground ; others, demoralized, turned tail and were running pell-mell across the field, over the hill. More shots were fired. Then despair—that soul-crushing, blinding despair—lifted a little from her face, and an unspeakable thanksgiving filled her eyes. Ahead, the Colonel, Lucius and Bob were riding three abreast. A

few harmless blacks followed in their wake. The Boss rode on, motionless in her saddle, with her head outlined against the clear sky, and her cloak hanging from one shoulder and trailing over the side of the horse in the dust. And so on, mile upon mile—her eyes always fastened upon the central figure ahead.

Outside the town of Charlottesville the Boss drew rein. With an inarticulate note of pathetic thanksgiving she watched the trio disappear. Then she turned her horse's head, and began her journey back.

Reaction had set in. The usual swiftness of her brain had disappeared : she suddenly became conscious of great physical weakness. The mental agony lost itself in the pallid distance before the cramped condition of her limbs. For the first time she remembered that she was on a man's saddle. In her fright she had caught up the first at hand, and the long ride—the tension of her nerves had exhausted her. The heart-rung drops of blood had ceased to flow ; and, more like a dead creature, she slowly crept over the hills and cliffs, a creeping chill of blackness enshrouding her. Meg and Mammy met her at the first gate.

“Boss ! Oh, Boss !” cried Meg brokenly.

“My honey lamb ! Oh, my lamb ! Oh, my Lawd !”

The Boss reached out her hand with the fixed gaze of one that sees something far off, a quivering smile breaking over her face.

“He—is—safe—Mammy !”

Then she slid from the saddle onto the ground, and lay upon her face like a dead woman.

* * * * *

That afternoon the Colonel sat in the front room of Dick Brunswick’s law office. He had drawn a peat-bottomed chair close to the window, and turned a slat in the green blind, so as to watch what passed in the street. His knees were drawn close together, a hand on either arm of the chair. His head was thrust forward, his face white, with little mottles of red in the cheeks.

The office was a very homely one. Two of the walls were covered with shelves containing rows of dusty law-books.

At the other end of the shelves was a mantel. The stove, rusty and old, the isinglass in shreds, stood conspicuously in the centre of the room.

A home-woven carpet covered only a portion of the deal-floor, and over the pigeon-holes, next to the desk, hung a steel engraving of General Robert E. Lee.

On another peat-bottomed chair, on the other side of the window, sat Dick Brunswick, lawyer and statesman.

Dick Brunswick was a man of great height, and the thinness of his legs gave him the appearance of being even taller. He wore his broadcloth coat buttoned close to his sharp, shaven chin.

He had black hair, which was parted on the side, and brought down in a deep scollop over his broad brow. His face was thin and haggard, but an air of perfect self-control characterized the man.

In a few words the Colonel explained the situation ; his story was interlarded with scorching invectives.

The lawyer had listened attentively, a keen interest gathering in his eyes. Then he cleared his attenuated throat and said, looking steadfastly at the Colonel :

“ Sounds pretty bad.”

The Colonel shook his fist, and made a step towards the door.

“ Damn it ! I don’t care how bad it sounds. You do the best you know how,

but get him out of that cursed lock-up as soon as you can. What say ? ”

The lawyer looked up slowly :

“ Haven’t said a word.”

The Colonel rumpled his white hair up with his hand.

“ The boy’s as innocent as you or I, Dick Brunswick. By God, sir, if it takes the whole damned law to prove it, it’s got to be done ! ”

“ Hold on, Colonel,” said the lawyer gravely ; “ it’s obvious that we have got to deal with very tangible facts.”

Then the lawyer rose, deliberately took his hat from a peg, dusted the top off with his elbow.

“ Reckon I’ll go and see Lucius. Come along, Colonel ; come along. We had better go together.”

They walked out of the office, down the main street, arm in arm, two of the tallest men in Virginia.

CHAPTER XI.

MAMMY picked up the Boss in her strong arms and carried her to her room, where she laid her tenderly down among the soft pillows. Meg rubbed her feet and moaned in a wistful way, stopping every now and then to wring her hands in despair.

After her swoon the Boss went into a deep sleep, which lasted three hours. When she opened her eyes, she stared like one awakened from a nightmare.

Mammy was bending over her. The Boss reached up feebly and drew down her face, kissing her on the cheek.

"Boss," said Meg with a sob, "isn't it—" Then her voice broke, and she could not say another word.

The Boss regarded her vaguely. She looked confused ; then came remembrance. Suddenly her face grew rigid ; her eyes opened wide with terror. She crossed her arms over her face, as if to shut out the

view ; she was confronting the old agony again. Then she sobbed aloud.

Mammy and Meg watched her, their own faces working with tears.

“Where—where is Bob ? Where is he ?” she repeated several times.

Meg drew close to the bed, and moved her arms down from her face. Her instinct told her this was something more than ordinary grief for a friend. She looked at the Boss tremblingly ; then she bent down her head and kissed her on the lips.

“Don’t cry so, dearest—don’t,” she whispered brokenly. “Try to get up and come over by the window. Bob is with him.”

They both helped her to rise, and she stood swaying a little, just in front of the bed. There was a blind look in the gray eyes.

“They—ought—to—take — him — some clean clothes,” she said slowly.

“Lawd, honey ! Dey don’ sont Rufus mos’ two hours ago wid a change,” said Mammy, pushing a chair behind her and placing a pillow under her feet.

“I ez gwine to mek you some tea, Miss Meg. Don’ you let her move tell I come back. Yo’ heah ?”

Meg nodded her head.

The old woman tiptoed across the room and closed the door upon her heels. The two girls sat holding each other's hands. The Boss had turned her face to the black night, her eyes growing more wistful as the moments went by. No word passed between them until, soft as a breath, came the whisper :

“Of what use is anything ?”

“What say, dear ?”

“Oh, Meg—Meg !” said the Boss, rocking back and forth. “In all my life I never imagined what suffering was until to-day. How I suffered—how I suffered ! It was terrible—terrible, terrible !” The pitiful repetition came almost hysterically from her lips.

“I cannot think. How will it end ? How will it all end ?” She turned her head back to the window.

Meg crouched on the floor, nursing her knees. She longed for the key to the Boss' confidence, yet dared not ask. She could read in her face, interpret in her voice the terrible anguish that racked her soul. If it had been Bob—but Lucius ! Ah ! Meg's face took on a startled look ; her pulse quickened, while confused myriads of recollections poured thick and fast upon

her brain. There was a moment's reflective pause.

"Boss," said Meg uneasily.

The Boss turned her face, and lifted her eyes with the look of one whose thoughts were elsewhere.

"What?"

Meg clasped the girl's hand and placed it against her cheek.

"Tell me about it. I know what happened after they left here. I met John Rusk on the road, and he told me. But before, I tried to get Mammy to explain, and she could think of nothing but that awful ride. How far did you go?"

"To Charlottesville," the Boss said wearily.

"All the way?"

"All the way."

"It's twenty-five miles from here," Meg said huskily, and choked as she touched the Boss' hand softly. "No wonder you fainted. After we brought you back, you slept for three hours."

"Did I?" Then for three hours I did not know." She paused a moment; then said, in a voice that had the sound of absence in it still, "I didn't see him when they first accused him. It must have

been fifteen or twenty minutes before the noise awoke me. They were all in the yard. When I ran downstairs, he was in the midst of them—" Her hands locked in her lap grew tight. "Those cowards all had rocks and guns, and he—he—was unarmed. Oh ! mind you, he wasn't afraid."

"Of course he was not," broke in Meg with eager comprehension.

"He stood there facing them, and said something, but I was too frightened to understand just what it was. It had the desired effect, though—for they let him go. Then—then—oh !" she said with a quick breath, "they followed him. There were shots, one right after the other ; then a lot in a bunch. It was miraculous that no one was hurt—at least, I don't think there was. Then I went crazy. The next thing I knew I was on Sweetbrier, galloping after them."

Meg sprang up and looked down, with glittering eyes, into the Boss' white face.

"You and Lucius are bricks ! What a situation !"

Then she saw a startled expression creep into the Boss' face, and with a little moan of contrition she threw herself down be-

fore her chair and dropped her head on the girl's knees.

"Go on, dear."

"That's all," said the Boss quietly. After she had spoken she sank back into her former attitude. They were silent again. It became so oppressive that Meg broke it in self-defence. The moon pushed its way through the droves of black clouds and flooded the room. Little puffs of hot air blew in at the window, and lifted the lace at the Boss' throat. Outside, the dead trunks of the trees showed gleaming white. The other parts of the earth were lost in shadow and mist. The effect was fantastic.

"Can't they bail him out? The idea of keeping a gentleman locked up all night in that jail, where they say rats come right out and sit in the middle of the floor!"

Meg shuddered. The Boss gave her an absent, miserable look, and tried to deaden the throb of her pulse by counting the beats.

"Human rats. They will surely find the real murderer soon. Poor Bill Owen, who could have hated him enough to kill him?" She sat thinking with her mind fixed upon a single idea: "Some one

stole Lucius' gun. I wonder who it was ? ”

“ One of the niggers ! ” exclaimed Meg with nervous abruptness.

“ Of course—certainly. But who ?—who ? Oh, my God ! tell us who ! ” burst out the Boss.

“ S—h,” said Meg soothingly. “ S—h ! ”

“ I can't. You don't know, or you would understand. Her face looked like a tragic mask in the chill moonlight.

“ Tell me,” urged Meg gently.

“ I was—” began the Boss. Then she stopped and stuck her fingers in her mouth. “ I c—c—can't.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I have given my word not to.”

“ That settles it,” said Meg resignedly. “ You'd lose your tongue before you'd speak.” The Boss winced a trifle.

“ The Colonel and Bob are with Lucius,” said Meg, after a little pause.

“ Of course.”

“ They telegraphed while you were asleep for some things.”

“ So ? ” said the Boss. Then, after a moment, she asked : “ Did the telegram say anything more ? ”

"Bob said to send over for me, but I was already here."

The Boss' face drew her eyes. "That was all—nothing about him—not a word."

Quite close to them they could smell the steam of tea. Mammy spoke over the Boss' shoulder.

"I ez got yo' tea, honey, an' a little snack, an' a nigger don' bring dis 'patch up from de station. I don' guv him a quarter." The Boss put out her trembling hand and broke the seal.

Meg struck a match and held it close to the yellow envelope :

"Take good care of yourself.—BOB."

The paper fluttered out of the window to the ground.

"Oh !" said the Boss. "Oh !"

She turned toward Mammy and held out her hand.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I am thirsty ; give me the tea." Suddenly she put down the saucer, and the cup rolled to the floor and broke into tiny pieces ; then she stood up straight and tried to lift her eyes.

"Help—me—to—the—be—" For the second time Boss in her healthy life she had fainted.

CHAPTER XII.

LUCIUS sat alone in his narrow cell.

He had dragged a stool close into the shade of the small barred window. The twittering of the birds outside was the only sound of nature that stirred the cold stillness of the night. On a deal table, shoved in the corner, stood a candle, its wick growing tall as it burnt its way deep into the tallow. It cast lank, grotesque shadows on the wall opposite and silhouetted the figure of the man—the sweeping moustache and thick locks of hair—with distinct clearness. Close to the candle, on the scarred table, with its circular drops of hot grease, lay an open box of Henry Clay cigars—Lucius' sole belonging, in this, his new home.

There was an instinctive raising of the man's shoulders, and deep lines of finest scorn were carved about his mouth, as he glanced around him. Presently he got up, threw down his unfinished cigar,

and bit the end off a fresh one for a dry smoke.

Outside, two figures were approaching the cell—two men, one short with a red face, monstrous girth and good-natured lines crinkling in the waves of fat about his eyes ; the other taller by two heads, his careless nonchalance changed into a rigid resolution to stand by his friend to the bitter end.

“ This way, sir,” said the smaller of the two. “ He is in No. 12.” The door of the cell slowly turned on its squeaking hinges and swung back with a mighty sound.

Lucius glanced up in an impersonal way. Over the jailer’s shoulder, close to him, arched in the gloom was another face.

Lucius sprang up, a look of unwonted pleasure lighting up his eyes.

“ Bob.”

“ Lucius.”

The two hands met. For a moment they looked at each other ; then, with a queer little catch in his voice, Lucius pointed to the stool.

“ Sit down, old chap ; it was awfully good of you to come.”

He pushed the box of cigars aside and

sat on the edge of the table, the light of the candle showing his white face, with its powerful lines. His eyes flashed like two sparks.

“ Sorry I haven't got a better place to receive you.”

Bob's eyes blurred as he reached out for a cigar. Lucius anticipated the movement, and handed him the box ; then he struck a light, and held it for him until the end of his cigar glowed.

“ The Colonel brought these this afternoon.”

Bob nodded.

The scene was pathetically impressive—the iron barred window; the chained door, plated with rusty iron; the bedless room; the single candle, and the two men in their riding-breeches,—looking so out of place with the rest of the apartment.

Bob passed his hand across his forehead uneasily.

“ The Colonel has retained Dick Brunswick. Oh, but of course you know that ; for they came here this afternoon, didn't they ? ”

Lucius moistened his dry mouth with his tongue.

“ Yes.” He looked at Bob. “ Dick

Brunswick has retained Irving Bulloch. God !” he said suddenly, “ how absurd this whole thing is ! Here I am, locked up, and have to go through the mortification of a public trial for murder, and I am guiltless of even an unkind thought against that dead man. It’s too much.”

“ Don’t worry, old chap. Of course it’s hard — deuced hard — damned hard. But everybody around here understands, and no jury on earth will condemn you.”

“ It isn’t that, Bob, so much as the disgrace. It’s maddening to find myself a mere hand-car on the railroad of life.”

He went on with sudden vehemence :

“ Think of being handed up before a court-room of people — tried for my life, questioned, discussed, regarded suspiciously, my name a by-word in every negro’s mouth. My God ! My God ! ”

Bob listened to this impassioned address. He felt sick, dazed, from sympathy.

“ Old boy,” he said hoarsely, “ it is a damned shame ; that’s what it is a——a—.” He got up, kicked away the stool with his spurred boot, and strode up and down, with his hands deep in his pockets.

Lucius gave a fierce sigh.

Bob stopped abruptly in his walk.

"Have you any idea who stole your pistol?"

"Not the remotest."

"When did you see it last?"

"I have been trying to remember—some time last week. Whoever took it, got it from my room."

"What did Dick Brunswick think of your case? I rode over to his house to ask him; but both the Colonel and he had gone over to Bulloch's, and wouldn't be back to-night. I got permission to come in and spend an hour with you; am putting up across the street at Dunkins'. By the way, I telegraphed for Rufus to bring you a change; he'll be over to-morrow."

"Thanks."

There was a listless pause—a silence in which the twittering of the birds died away, leaving an awful stillness behind, nothing to break the quiet and solitude of the earth.

"Have you heard from home? Did you leave any men to look after the women?" asked Lucius hurriedly, addressing Bob, but looking deliberately just over his head. "If you haven't done so, why don't you send a wire to Rusk?"

"I sent one three hours ago, and one to Meg. I was afraid Boss might come here. It would be just like her. God bless her! she's mighty fond of you, Lucius," Bob said very quietly.

A fire suddenly shot into Lucius' eyes; his face grew set and rigid and he quivered as if he had been shot.

"Great Heaven! she must not do that." He spoke with the impulse of uncontrolled fear. "Keep her from doing anything so rash." Then he turned and made a pretence of lighting another cigar. He was trying to get his calmness back. When he turned, his face was quivering as with a fury. He did not resume his seat, but walked backwards and forwards, the cords in his neck knotted and twisted and his lips compressed.

Bob leaned against the wall and watched him with grave, sad eyes. A feeling of deep pity filled him.

"It's pretty tough on you," he said, "to be shut within these four walls, where the sun never shines. As I said before, it's a damned shame."

Lucius took two heavy strides and stopped by the window; then wheeled half around, his arms folded in front of him,

suppression written in every line of his face.

“ Have you heard any more particulars about the murder ? ” he said at last.

“ Where was he shot ? ”

“ In the throat, as well as I could make out ; the bullet severed the jugular vein.”

“ Was he robbed ? ”

“ No : his watch and wallet were found on the body.”

Lucius lifted his black eyebrows in surprise.

“ You see,” continued Bob, “ ever since Bill Owen married that mulatto woman, the whites have been down on him. My theory is, that one of his first wife’s family did it. It wouldn’t surprise me a bit.” Bob fixed his eyes meditatively on the floor, saying : “ It occurred to me, as Bill Lewis was his brother, and he hates you, that he—”

Lucius’ eyes glowed.

“ Yes, but how did he get my pistol ? It would have been impossible for him to enter the ground without being recognized.”

“ He might have bribed one of the negroes ;—they would sell their souls for money.”

"True," muttered Lucius hoarsely, "I never thought of that."

Bob nodded his comprehension.

"I knew you hadn't. That's what I wanted to see Dick Brunswick about. I'll tell him the first thing in the morning. Look here, old chap, my time is up. I only had an hour, and I promised to go on the minute. By the way, I brought you something to drink," said he briefly. He put his hand in his breast-pocket and drew out a pint bottle of sour mash, offering it to Lucius, and saying : "After you."

"Put the spirits down to raise the spirits up, hey Bob?" said Lucius, with a low, harsh, thick laugh. He took a deep draught, and then returned the bottle without a word.

The door opened with a bang.

"Sorry, sir—time's up," said the jailer, his voice pitched to a high key, but which, somehow, had a ring of good cheer in it.

Bob's face grew sad, with sorrowful affection as he put out his hand, and turned his head from Lucius, that he might not see the scalding tears.

"Good-night ; I wish I could hang out with you." Bob drew his breath in with difficulty.

Lucius' set face changed into lines of tenderness. He grasped his friend's hand and held it tight; then wrung it hard.

"Thank you," he said quietly; "thank you."

Without a word more he turned and found his way back to the table. Bob regarded him wistfully for a moment; then the iron door shut and was locked.

Lucius was alone.

One by one the stars pierced the pale sky. A particularly bright one shone like a great watching eye between the bars of the window. But Lucius saw nothing; his head was down, and he was holding in his hand a soiled pink glove. The little fingers, laid over his palm, showed the well-known shape of the wearer's hand.

"Boss, my beloved!" he cried in agony. But the little stars alone heard him; they alone saw the quivering of the huge shoulders. Then the strong man broke into a passion of tears, while the thin, gray rats scampered across the floor, squeaking.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next day the Boss was too ill, and the next and the next, to remember with distinctness the horrors of the past week. It was ten days before she was quite awake to the keenness of her mental anguish. She lay for hours looking at the window with blank, dreary eyes. She was trying to grapple with the present—trying to stereotype the situation upon her mind. She avoided talking, on the plea that her head ached. Her face was different from that of the old Boss. The cheeks had grown thin and pale ; the eyes had lost their gray brightness ; the beautiful, passionless *passionate* lips never curved into smiles now. There was a rigidity of suffering about them that made Meg drop on her knees more than once, and beg God to ease her heart of its overmastering sense of pain.

Meg's was an energetic nature. As soon

as she had convinced herself of the Boss' feelings for Lucius, she tried to remedy the evil ; failing in that, to assuage the suffering.

To the Boss her past happy life, with its winning remembrances, seemed like a bright dream, from which she had only just awakened to full consciousness.

One morning, two weeks after Lucius' arrest, Meg, who had never left her, was astonished when she saw the Boss come down-stairs and open the dining-room door, perfectly groomed, the soul looking out of her two eyes, set and resolute. The Boss said she was entirely well this morning, and added, with a dreary little smile, that she didn't intend to scare them any more. She set her small, white teeth, and went about eating her breakfast with a heart sick and aching.

The men had taken up their residence in Charlottesville, to be near the court. They had heard of the Boss' illness as only exhaustion from over-excitement. Bob had telegraphed back to her, " Everything O. K. Lucius will be home soon." It was not the truth, but under the conditions he had no trouble in reconciling the white lie to his conscience.

"I want you to bring Sweetbrier round after lunch," said the Boss to Uncle Rufus as she moved away from the table.

"Lawdy, honey, she ez lame in de lef' leg uver sence de day—" He was about to say more, but Meg hurriedly drowned his voice by upsetting her cup.

The Boss pushed back the hair from her face, and said quietly, in that low, constrained tone one uses when one is determined to suppress agitation :

"Dear, dear old Brier!" Then she took up her hat and moved towards the door. There was something in her face that made Meg follow and take her by the arm.

"Where are you going, Boss?"

"To the stable. I want to see Sweetbrier. She has never deserted me, nor shall I her," she answered with gentle earnestness.

As they stepped out into the garden, they saw, coming through the morning sunlight, the figure of a short man, with a worn, intent face that told of suffering, of fasting and prayers, of loss of sleep—of one whose eyes were turned inward, whose hopes were fixed in the shadow of a higher world.

Meg started and blushed

"It's John Rusk!" she exclaimed hastily.

"Good-morning, Boss! Howdy, Meg?" he said gently as he reached them.

"Good-morning, John," answered the Boss, stretching out her hand. 'The little parson took it in both of his and held it while he asked :

"Are you better? I am so glad to see you out again! You are sure you feel all right?"

"Oh, yes—much, thanks."

John Rusk dropped her hand and smiled sweetly, saying. "That's right."

Meg said her first word of greeting with gruff abruptness. It was :

"John Rusk, you look like a ghost. You've been up all night; you are trying to kill yourself. Is that what you call religion? I like more robust Christianity myself."

For a second, he was taken aback.

"The Williamsons' baby died last night of croup, and the poor mother was grieving hard. I couldn't have left them," he murmured apologetically.

"That's it. It's always somebody can't be left alone—somebody ill, or somebody dying. You seem to forget that you are

made of flesh and blood, and can get sick as well as another person," Meg answered, almost violently. "It's just a shame—that's what it is!"

They reached the stable, and the Boss went inside. The little parson's eyes wandered over the landscape and came back to Meg's face. Her cheeks were flushed, a little tear trembled in the corner of her eye; it brimmed over and rolled down her face, and fell in a big splash on the pink and white of her gown.

The little parson half stretched out his hand twice; but each time drew it back again, his eyes shining with an unnatural lustre. Then he drifted back into the old self-surrendered look, while a smile lit up his face.

"For a moment I thought you were crying for me." He turned his eyes towards the sky, as a long beam from the sun streaked his upturned face, bringing out the haggard lines with startling clearness, while another beam surrounded his head like a halo.

Meg popped open her mouth with an impatient gesture, but John Rusk shook his head with tender denial.

"Of course you were not. I was foolish."

The next moment he started towards the door of the barn.

Meg leaned forward and caught him by the arm.

"I was crying about you, and for nobody else," she said, in a loud, clear voice.

The man drew in a deep, full breath, and unconsciously interlocked his fingers.

"For me, Meg?" he said softly.

"Yes, for you—for you—you—you—poor, old bungling fellow! Don't you suppose it hurts me to see you slowly but surely killing yourself before my very eyes? You ought to have somebody to take care of you," she said in a little broken, motherly voice.

The little parson hitched up his shoulders: he felt unsteady.

"There is only one person I ever wanted to take care of me, since mother died," he said with a quiver in his voice. "You know who she is, Meg, don't you?"

Meg's face flushed hotly. She drew a short, sudden breath; then held out her hand in a determined little way.

"Yes, I do know; and, what is more, if after you have heard what I am going to tell you, you still want me, I'll take care

of you—for always,” she finished in a jerky whisper.

The man's short form stood out clear against the light ; then he tottered unsteadily, his wide-open, dark eyes fixed on her mutely. The beating of his heart had doubled, and suddenly his face showed more color.

“Meg,” he whispered softly, “don't say it unless you mean it.”

“I do mean it—honest. But first I've got a story to tell you. It's a sore point, I have never spoken of it but to one person, the Boss. And now to you,” she finished, coming nearer to him.

The revulsion of feeling had come so suddenly that John Rusk felt exhausted. He bowed his head in silence, and then dragged his feet wearily, one after the other, until he could lean against the side of the barn. He was like one thoroughly worn out.

Meg watched him anxiously and shook her head.

“You're almost dead. Reckon I had better tell you some other time, hadn't I ? ”

The little parson didn't follow the words at first. He was overwhelmed. Suddenly

he brought back his mind and smiled up at Meg. He spoke slowly, his voice showing the pressure he was under.

"Dear, God is good! God is good! He has given me what my heart has asked for. Go on, Meg; but, before you commence, let me tell you there is nothing you can say that would"—he stretched out his hands yearningly—"that would make me *not* want you."

"Wait!" said Meg rather hurriedly. "Wait!" She moistened her dry lips with the tip of her tongue, then began to speak in a clear, concise manner.

"Years ago, John, when you asked me to marry you, I was full of going East and making an actress of myself, and I refused you. I didn't love you as—as—a woman should love her husband—I loved you as a sister might, only that, and I told you so, didn't I? I was honest, wasn't I?"

"Yes." The little parson stood there watching her, hardly seeming to breathe, his great love working through his frame—an intensely sweet love it was, that flooded his whole being with sunshine. Meg took a step nearer.

"Well, John, I went away. I thought

of you often and wished lots of times that I might see you; but only as a sister, always as a sister. Then, John, I met some one one who made me forget you. I even ceased to remember you as a sister; I only cared for him !” Meg covered her eyes with her hands. The little parson’s face looked thinner and paler.

“Go on,” he said, putting out his fair, slender hand. It trembled and only reached her shoulder, but the loving pressure reassured her.

“I gave him all there was to give—my whole heart. He was not worthy, John. Now I despise him. I have no heart left; there is nothing inside of me but waste,” she stopped abruptly. Then began again in the gentlest of voices: “But I do like you, John; I like to be with you. If I could care for anybody again, it would be for you; and if—if you think I could make you happy dear, I wish you would take me.”

Over the pallid face of John Rusk came the sweetest of smiles. He lifted his eyes to heaven. His lips moved, and then he held out his arms.

“Come, dear.”

Meg walked straight into them. There

was a long, long silence. It was a supreme moment ; the man was calling upon his God to thank Him.

Not ten steps away stood the Boss, with her arms about the Brier's neck, the two splendid heads close together. The light was dulled in the spirited eyes of the beast, and she rested unsteadily on her two fore-legs. The Boss lifted her mouth and kissed the brown soft nose.

"My beautiful !" A light of recognition flashed in the eyes of the mare. She rubbed her head caressingly against the Boss' shoulder. Behind them came the sound of footsteps.

"Is she injured ?" asked John Rusk, close to them. Something in his voice made the Boss look around quickly. From his face her eyes flew to Meg's. Meg's gaze was wandering over the barn ; her hair was tumbled, and two scarlet spots burned in her cheeks.

"What is it ?" gasped the Boss. "You haven't——"

"Yes," said Meg timidly.

"We have," said the little parson softly.

The Boss' hand met his suddenly and closely.

"Oh, John !" the Boss reached out her

other hand and caught Meg's, with which she was trying to hide her face. ^

“ Meg, have you told him ? ”

The girl nodded. She was crying now—trembling with sobs—and her face looked like a pink crocus.

“ Oh, I am so glad ! ” said the Boss, as a flash of delight flooded her face—“ so awfully glad ! ”

The little parson's lips and eyelids were trembling ; then he looked up, and fixed his gaze on a patch of sky seen through the window.

“ God is good ! ” he stammered.

Meg was still crying, her breast heaving, her cheek pressed against the soft skin of the horse's flank. The Boss, after a sharp breath or two, spoke :

“ How glad Lucius will be ! He has often spoken of just this thing to me. You must not get married until he is home again. It would break his heart not to be at the wedding. Have you heard any news ? ” she asked heavily.

Meg raised her eyes abruptly, and spoke through her sobs.

“ Bob telegraphed that everything was going on nicely, not to worry.”

"Thank God !" said the Boss, throwing up her head with a thankful gesture.

"Amen !" said the man gently. "I should like so much to go to him, but my place is here. He wrote me a line through his lawyer, and asked me for his sake to stay by you girls." He put his hand in his breast-pocket. "I have the letter here." He drew it out and held it towards the Boss. "Perhaps you would like to read it ?"

He handed it to her and put his arm about Meg, whose shoulders still shook, though her sobs had ceased.

The Boss followed the lines with down-cast head. The words, so full of thoughtfulness for herself, choked her. She returned the note with a sad smile, and glanced out over the wide green landscape ; and when she returned them to the group beside her, there was something of the old sparkle in their glance.

"He will certainly be home soon," she said.

"Of course," said Meg.

"God grant it !" said the little parson.

The Boss colored slightly, and moved her hands up and down the Brier's mane in a nervous manner.

“Do you think, if I went over to Charlottesville, that I could see him?” she went on. “It would cheer him up; it must be so lonely there all alone.”

John Rusk looked at her and shook his head.

“I don’t think the Colonel would want you to, Boss. He is not alone; Bob is with him.”

“Yes,” she said softly, with a sigh. “I know; I only thought, perhaps—” But she never finished what she was going to say.

The little parson walked over the hill, through the valley, across the stream to his home—his thin face softened to a wonderful sweetness, his lips moving, and his eyes fixed dreamily ahead of him.

In the house he had left behind, Meg knelt beside her bed, her hands clasped tight, her blue eyes closed. She was praying to God that a second love might not be impossible.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was ten o'clock on Monday morning. The court-room was filled with a close wall of human beings. Women in fine clothes, men and negroes, formed abrupt waves of variegated color. The arrest of Lucius had created a sensation in the county of Albe-marle.

The prisoner faced the audience like a graven image. He made only one gesture—a proud negative—when they asked, “Guilty, or not guilty?”

“Not guilty,” he said, in a firm, distinct voice, then he folded his arms and waited.

The court was held in a low-studded room, with a huge beam across the ceiling, and six windows, all open to catch the fervid breath from the streets.

Close to the prisoner's dock sat the Colonel and Bob; the Colonel with a face a shade sterner than usual, his eyes just tipped with the signs of anxious trouble. He did not hold himself with quite the old erectness, but stooped, as if exhausted.

Next to him sat Dick Brunswick. He was leaning forward with his elbows on the table in front of him, his eyes half shut, his lips screwed up, and the tips of his fingers just meeting.

The judge, a lumpish man, with saffron-colored skin, from an excess of tea-drinking, fixed his small, sharp eye on the prisoner with an expression not easy to fathom.

The attention of the court was intently drawn by the proceedings.

A man, a negro, was the first to be called. He testified:

“Meh name ez Criss Allyn; I ez married, an’ own a farm in Buckin’ham. I know de prisoner—ez knowed him uver sence he fust come heah. I knowed his pa befo’ ’im. I wuz walkin’ th’oo de fields, leadin’ meh mar’ by de bridle, when I heah her snort an’ t’row up her haid, an’ right dar in de bushes wuz a man. He look’ like he sleep. Shinin’ in de light wuz a pistil close by a clump o’ grass. Den somethin’ tell me he wuz dead. I holler to meh ole woman, who wuz in de cart, an’ we bofe ob us tu’ned him ober, an’ sho’nuff dyah wuz a bullet-hole clean th’oo he troat. Meh ole woman begin ter cry, but

I say shet up while I holler. By-an'-by, two white men, who wuz workin' on Jones' farm, cum up an' axed what wuz de matter? An' I show 'em Massa Owen lyin' dyah dead. Dey axed me how it happen, an' I tole 'um all I knowed. Jes' den one o' um see de pistil, an' he pick it up an' tu'ned it ober. Den he cry out, 'Lucius Strange, by Gord!' I axed 'im ef dat wuz Massa Lucius' pistil, an' he say yass, an' dat Massa Lucius would hang fur dat. An' dat's all I know."

When shown the pistol, he was asked if that was the one, and he said he could take his oath to it.

The next witness was his wife. Her story corroborated the statement of her husband exactly.

The evidence of the next witness struck a chord in the court : they started and looked towards the prisoner.

He sat immovable; an inscrutable smile curved his lips.

The witness was a man, a rough laborer. He said:—

"My name is Thomas Paget. I am a carpenter, and live just beyond the station on the main road. One month ago, in the evening, toward six o'clock, I was coming

home from work, a quarter of a mile from the house, when I saw the prisoner, Mr. Strange, talking to Mr. Owen in the middle of the road. They seemed to be having high words. As I passed them, I heard the prisoner say: 'Bill Owen, you are a disgrace to the community—a white man married to a nigger! You ought to be tarred and feathered and kicked out of the county!' I thought Bill Owen looked mad. Then I heard him say (they talked so loud anybody could have heard them distinctly twenty feet away): 'If you say that again I'll brain you!'—'Oh no, you won't,' said Mr. Strange; 'but take care of your tongue, or some day you'll get an ounce of lead in you.' He said something else, but I could not catch it. When I turned off at the corner, I looked back and they were still talking, so I went on about my business. I told my wife when I went home that Mr. Strange was giving Owen the very devil, and she said it served him right."

For the first time the prisoner seemed to take an interest in what was being said; but as the man finished he relapsed back into the indifference that had characterized his behavior from the beginning.

Bob listened with a disgusted horror

that would not allow him to take his eyes off the jury, nor to listen to the low, earnest remarks of the attorneys. His inner feelings were too intense to gather in outward objects. His ears were burning, and his under lip was caught and held between his teeth. At any damaging statement his right hand would clutch under the sudden stress.

After one or two witnesses had given their testimony,—all bearing on the same subject, Lucius was placed upon the witness-stand,—and told to state his whereabouts on the night of the murder, from the hours of twelve until five o'clock.

“At what time did you retire?” asked the prosecution.

“I didn't retire at all. I fell asleep about four o'clock, and slept until five.”

“How did it happen that you did not go to bed?”

“I had business to attend to that kept me up.”

“What sort of business?”

“I was packing.”

“Were you going away?”

“I was.”

“Where?”

“I object,” said Dick Brunswick, thrust-

ing his hands into his pockets and shaking his head.

“Very well. What time did you get through packing?”

“About one o'clock.”

“What did you do before you commenced to pack?”

“I wrote a letter.”

“To whom?”

“I decline to answer.”

“Gentlemen, the prisoner declines to answer.”

“What did you do after you had finished packing?”

“Remained in my room.”

“Alone?”

“I decline to discuss my personal affairs.”

“On the plea that to answer would incriminate you?”

For a moment Lucius lifted his hand with an imperious gesture. The crowd looked up as one man. Not a soul breathed. He struggled for a moment, and those who were nearest to him saw him shut his teeth hard, while a new color touched his cheek. Then he said, with careful quietness :

“Yes.”

As Lucius spoke the Colonel glanced up

at him ; then bowed his head, breathing deeply.

Bob shook his big shoulders and wiped his brow.

The prosecuting attorney put his thumb to his broad snub nose, and his huge jaw set itself in a smile of infinite malice.

Dick Brunswick frowned, and leaning over to his colleague said :

“ Damn ! ”

Then he blew his nose again and again.

After that there was more tiresome examinations. The invidious acrimony of the prosecuting attorney made Lucius out a violent criminal, a wantonly cruel man—a man who, without any provocation, seemingly for no reason but a Cainish desire to kill, had taken a fellow-man’s life. His cunning brain had woven a network of such incontestible proof that before the day was out Lucius’ conviction seemed inevitable.

“ For God’s sake, old man, speak out ! ” pleaded Bob, whose face looked distorted from the long strain. It was the afternoon before the final examination—just the hour that creeps between sunset and twilight.

“ What do you say, sir ? ” Lucius turned

to the Colonel, who was standing with his face to the window. You could see the quivering of the Colonel's huge shadow thrown by the departing sun on the blank wall opposite. He turned ponderously and placed his hand heavily on Lucius' shoulder, his fine old face pale to the very lips.

"What do you say, sir?" again asked Lucius.

"I don't know why you are silent, but I have enough confidence in you to understand to speak means dishonor. Don't speak."

Lucius squared his shoulders in instant relief. He had known before what the answer would be, but he felt better having heard it.

"Nor would I have you do anything dishonorable, Lucius," said Bob. "I was in hopes——"

Lucius put out an untrembling hand and stopped him, a wonderful sweetness gathering in his voice.

"Say no more, Bob; you would do as I am doing. God bless you, old man!" Just then his voice trembled a little. It was the first sign of weakness he had shown; then the lips grew set and stern

again, and he turned the conversation pointedly aside. During the short time allowed him he spoke only upon the matter of business—things he wanted attended to. All this with perfect outward calmness. He told them where to find his will, and what he wanted done with certain pieces of property, until they shook hands at parting ; and when the last echo of their heel-taps had died away, the hard lines about his mouth returned, and the dark shadows grew under his eyes. He extended his arms wide and threw them back, then let them slowly fall. Suddenly he came to himself with a start, for he heard a voice he loved, still invisible, say, "Thank you, in about an hour." He moved swiftly across the room, and met the little parson at the door. John Rusk grasped his hand tremulously, and faltered in his greeting.

"God bless you !" he said.

"God bless you !" said Lucius.

"I would have come before," said John Rusk—Lucius was looking deep into his eyes—"only I knew you would rather I remained with the Boss."

Lucius' big hand tightened on his visitor's slender one.

“Is she well?” he asked softly.

“Yes, only broken-hearted over your arrest, though she has no idea half how serious it is.”

Lucius let the little parson’s hand slip from his fingers.

“That’s right. She must not know,” as his voice grew hushed and grave. “I wish to heaven I could keep her in ignorance until after it is over—one way or the other.”

John Rusk sat down on the stool and let his thin arms fold across his lap.

“You love her,” he said.

Lucius turned quickly, his head erect, and his full face turned towards the questioner.

“As my very soul—far better than my life!”

The little parson ran his hand nervously through his hair.

“She loves you just as dearly,” he said with a sensitive flush. “I was afraid of it for a long time, and lately I have been sure. Any one to look into her sad eyes would see it; everybody except Bob—poor, generous, lovable Bob! Do you know?” he continued, watching Lucius yearningly “that she followed you on horseback the

entire way to Charlottesville the day you were arrested. It was the——"

Lucius leaned against the wall. He was looking down at the little man, but was entirely oblivious of him. He was following his own emotions, and the world had passed quite away from him.

John Rusk drew a long sigh, and continued :

"It was that—the fatigue and the long fast—that made her ill."

The abstraction passed away from Lucius immediately, and he gave an inarticulate cry of pain.

"Was she ill? Is she all right now? Was it serious? Tell me, John, is she all right? Quite well—you are sure? Don't deceive me, old man, especially now. I would rather know the truth. Tell me," he finished, so wistfully interrogative.

The little parson turned his saddened face upon him with a soft look in his eyes :

"She is all right, Lucius, as far as her health is concerned ; but her mind, of course, is troubled."

Lucius took in a deep, full breath; the dilation contracted in his eyes, though the hand against the wall still quivered.

A slow, winning smile crossed his face.

“ I haven’t congratulated you, and Meg too; that’s the best piece of news I have heard this month. I was afraid you were going in for old bachelorhood, but am thankful my fear was ungrounded.”

“ Yes, I am to be congratulated. I am a very lucky man. God has given me more than I deserve,” said the little parson with much simplicity.

“ I have made my will, John, and have left the cottage to Meg. I thought,—oh, it’s only in case the worst comes to the worst,—and it’s always well to be prepared, you know. I thought it would please the Boss to have Meg so near her. You can use it for a hunting-lodge, or”—Lucius almost laughed--“a playhouse for the children.”

“ I pray it may be God’s will that it will never leave your hands,” (with a sudden trouble in his throat.) “ The way of our Father is past finding out.”

Then there was a little pause.

“ Lucius, you are a grand fellow!—You are bearing yourself under this severe trial—like—the noble man I have always known you to be;—a trial that would crush or harden most any other nature. Your courage is sublime;—your strength seems to grow with the increasing danger.”

"I have done no wrong," answered Lucius quietly; "why should I weaken? I am the victim of fate. I am watching for the next move. It's like a game of chess played by inexperienced hands," he broke off grimly; then began again:—

"Don't let's talk of myself; the subject has been worn threadbare. I have other more important things to speak about—the Boss." He went to his friend and laid his arm about his neck. "Of my Boss," he said so tenderly, as a flash lit up his whole face. "I leave her in your care, John. Watch over and guard her as your life. She will marry Bob, and in a few years my memory will have faded like the voices in the night. It's then that I want her to find in you what I would have been to her, had I been permitted to continue a part of her life. Promise me, John—promise that she will always find you ready, willing to be her very good friend."

The little parson listened to the grave, sad voice, and then looked up into the white face, which the confinement had deprived of all its rich brown color, and said solemnly:

"I promise."

The magnificent pair of shoulders drooped lower over the insignificant ones.

“If I should be convicted and sent away, I will be deprived of all my personal effects. I have a glove in my pocket that belongs to her. I want you to take it back to her.”

The little parson was completely overcome with grief now. He was listening with his eyes toward the floor.

Lucius took him by the hand.

“I have loved you dearly, John, and your friendship has been a precious boon to me. I have been proud to be your friend, to walk by your side—you good, courageous John. It is only in times like this that a man realizes what it is to have a friend like you. Don’t cry, old boy.” His own voice was faltering and broken—a power of human love brooded in his passionate eyes.

“If I could help you, Lucius—if I could give my life, I would do it willingly to save you.”

“I believe you.” Lucius turned away: they were both striving to control themselves.

John Rusk got up feebly, and looked visibly shrunken in his threadbare clerical coat.

“ Good-night: God bless you, and bring you through this safely ! ” he stammered.

“ God bless you, and good-night ! ” repeated Lucius huskily. He understood the pain and grief of the little parson ; for a like grief had caught at his own heart.

CHAPTER XV.

“AND Lucius sent me no message?” asked the Boss, with her hungry gray eyes fixed with strained directness upon Bob’s face.

“Yes, he told me to tell you that he was in no danger whatever, and for you to keep your promise. O Boss!” Bob faltered, for he could keep up the farce no longer, “Boss, it wasn’t so. We’ve been telling you a lie. As sure as we are standing here, Lucius will be convicted, the——”

The Boss stood and stared at him, a frozen, animated figure, with eyes that dilated, showing almost black against the greenish pallor of her face—a pallor that reached her throat. Her fingers were like yellow wax, and her nails had the bluish tint of the dead. She opened her mouth, and repeated stupidly over and over again the words Bob had uttered.

“You told me a lie—‘sure as we stand

here, he will be convicted.' You told me a lie—you told me a lie !”

“My God, darling!” cried Bob, laying his hands upon her shoulder as she swung backwards and forwards, “don’t look like that—let me carry you to a seat.”

“Let me be—I am trying to collect my reason.”

She tore his hands away with icy fingers, and slipped backwards. “Trying to resolve what—what is to be done—if it isn’t too late.” Her arms hung down by her sides, and in the short space her cheeks had sunken, the white forehead had grown lined and heavy, and the black shadows deepened under the staring, straining eyes.

Bob watched her breathlessly. He could have choked himself for having told the truth. Now her expression frightened him, for he realized suddenly that she had been more ill than they were aware. His beautiful Boss was growing old while he watched her.

She sank upon a chair near by.

“When will the verdict be rendered?” she asked, in a difficult unmodulated voice.

“Summing up of the case commences at nine o’clock ; it may last two or three

hours. Then the case will be given to the jury. It may take all day or longer ; it all depends," Bob whispered across the space that separated them.

The Boss leaned forward, her elbows on her knees, her face between her hands. She tried to ask a question, but something thick and strange in her throat prevented her. Presently she made a great effort and raised her head, as a scarlet flood rushed across her cheeks and forehead. She fastened her restless, eager eyes upon Bob's face.

"You say he will surely be——" The strained voice broke suddenly.

"God help us ! Yes," answered Bob helplessly.

"And you, when do you go back ?"

"Immediately. I was worried about you, dearest : so I stole away, and I've been riding since two o'clock. I've ordered a fresh horse ; he will be around at once."

"I am going back with you," she said hoarsely.

"Hush, Boss ; it is impossible."

"I am going with you," she reiterated between her set teeth.

"Boss darling, listen."

"I am going with you !" she cried wildly.

"I tell you I will! You needn't try to prevent me. Nothing under heaven can do that now. I've been a coward, and you—you have been criminal. Listen! If anything happens to Lucius, as you hear me, if they hang him, his death will lie at your door. You have fooled me with your lying telegrams. I am going, I am going; and if I get there too late" (she struck her two hands together) "I'll kill myself. You hear? What's the matter with you? Why do you look at me so? I'm sane! Oh yes, quite sane—only—O my God! my God! my God!" Then she threw herself upon her knees, and buried her face in the Turkish rug, tearing at the satin pillows with her little nails.

Bob watched her, dizzy with dismay. It was impossible to reconcile this passion-tossed woman with his splendid, stately Boss. He thought suddenly that she was ill, and a certain conviction came into his face. It was the delirium of fever. He must call Mammy, and they would send at once for the doctor. He stretched out his hand toward the bell.

Suddenly a great calm fell upon the girl. She got up and faced him, as she lifted her hand with a gesture of command:

“ Don’t ring! ”

With the other hand she steadied herself against the wall.

“ Forgive me,” said she, softening under his sad gaze. “ I am weak ; your news was overwhelming. Don’t mind me, Bob. Only I mean what I said ; I am going with you. Lucius was our best friend,—yours and mine ; and—I—I—we would never forgive ourselves if we were not near him in the great trial of his life. You must take me, Bob. You love me, don’t you ? ” She tried to smile, but the stiffness of her lips prevented her. “ If you love me, take me along.”

Bob remained speechless, with his hand upon the bell. Presently he moved towards her.

“ Do you mean this, really ? Do you know what you are saying ? We have twenty-five miles to ride—not in a buggy, but on horseback. We will get there just before daylight. You are not well enough. Don’t ask it,” he pleaded.

“ Bob, you love me, don’t you ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered, beside himself.

“ Then take me.”

“ You are crazy, I believe.”

“ No, I’m sane. Do as I ask. I am go-

ing anyhow, but I would rather go with you."

"Very well," he said between his teeth, "go and get ready."

"Thank you, Bob," she said with panting eagerness; "thank you ever so much. Bob, I should like you to kiss me. Always remember, dear, whatever happens, I was very, very fond of you. I appreciated everything you ever did. You are noble, Bob. Always remember that I knew it from the first; always knew it—always."

Bob never realized how she left the room. He watched her dully. He felt as if he were part of a dream, caused by a disordered mind.

Her beseeching voice was ever present with him. Like an echo, it dominated his after life. In all the long years ahead, if he had only known then,—if he had only known—

As he turned towards the mantelpiece, Mammy entered the room. She came through the door leading from the pantry, which she carefully closed and locked behind her.

"Massa Bob, Rufus say yo' ain' eat nuffin' sence befo' day. Gord! yo' stomach mus' be alternatin' wid yo' back-

bone." She pushed a chair forward, and eased him into it as she would have done a child.

"Yo' ez tremblin' like a fiddle-string. Rufus, he ez scared mós' to deaf about yo', wid dat long fas'. Yo' look like yo' ain' got a drap o' blood in yo' veins. What ez de matter? Ez yo' skeerd, honey—sho' nuff?"

"Tiddy boy—Tid-dy," she called, throwing wide open the brilliant polished window, and jamming her yellow bandanaed head against the woodwork in her hurry.

"Don' rar' yo'sef so skittish—bring dat julip heah Massa Bob ez perishin' wid hunger." She drew back her head and moved towards the door, then swung around slowly and looked at the silent figure in the high-backed chair, the picture of physical fatigue and mental suffering.

"Dyar kyahnt nobody beat Rufus makin' juleps," she spoke with proud conviction. "Gord mout, nobody else." She moved nearer the door, then came back a step because he hadn't noticed her.

"Ain' yo' hongry, Massa Bob?" she asked.

Bob raised his head with a sudden sort of leap, and passed his hand over his brow. He had been listening to quick steps overhead. He had not heard one word.

"What are you saying, Mammy?" he asked slowly. "I didn't hear you."

Mammy tossed her head with a sniff.

"I am sorry—I was thinking——" he finished wearily.

Mammy surrendered to the sad voice, and prepared to compromise.

"I axed yo',—ain' yo' hongry? Dat's what I say."

"I don't know—am I?"

"Ob cose yo' ez, heah, yo' tame tomat," she cried, snatching at the julep Rufus presented at the door. Just then something in the old man's tired, pathetic face recalled Cerity, and she paused and shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Honey, will yo' bring in de ham an' de biskits, reach in yo' han' onder meh apun an' git de keys, de big one wid de leetle hole," she said, with wonderful tenderness in her voice. For Mammy to allow any one to go near the sacred precincts of her pantry, was a mark of especial attention.

Rufus appreciated the honor, and the languid form became suddenly alert.

“Will I brung de cream togerr wid de ham bone?” he asked confidentially.

“I dunno—yes,—yes,” she repeated. “you mought.”

Rufus disappeared.

Mammy set about fixing the side-table with a plate and knife and fork, then took up the julep and placed it beside the plate. Next she brought out a brilliantly polished tin with the remains of a rice pudding, deliciously eatable in its appearance.

Bob watched the movement of her yellow-palmed hands with unseeing eyes. He was noticing the change in the footsteps upstairs, the heavy tramp of the riding-boots from the soft click of the French slippers.

When the ham and biscuits were laid out, Mammy whispered to Uncle Rufus :

“I ez feared he’s sick ; I ain’ never see him act like dat befo’.”

He’s jes’ sturbed ’bout Massa Lucius,” Rufus returned the whisper. “He look like he ain’ sleep nor ain’ eat sence he lef’ home, an’ po’ Miss Boss don’ look like she kyahnt cry no mo’; her eyes look grèvous. Hit mek meh feel tossified.”

“Come on, honey’!” Mammy said to Bob; “come on an’ eat comfobul. You’s

got a long ride befo' yo'. Yo'd better fill yo'sel full o' vituals."

"Thank you, Mammy. I wish you would make the Boss eat something, too. She's going with me. It's not my fault," he hastened to explain, as he noted her horrified eyes. "She says she will go, and she means it."

"Name o' Gord ! what she tinkin' 'bout? Honey lamb, whar ez yo' ? Gord ! Gord ! she sut'n'y ez crazy," she cried, running to the door and panting heavily up the stairs ; "she sut'n'y ez sho'."

The Boss and Bob had left behind ten miles of the twenty-five. For an hour no word had been spoken between them.

From the first, the Boss had drifted into the nightmare of her thoughts, only to start back into the sudden consciousness of another's presence beside her own. Through the dark hours of the night she knew she must face the awful spectre that had arisen.

To-night she was the Boss, the honored daughter of Colonel Cameron, respected and beloved ; to-morrow, a disgraced, lost creature. After that—blank !

The girl never doubted the truth of

her father's teaching : she knew that dishonor meant death. Her father would not be able to recall her memory with anything but horror. With her own disgrace she had pulled down about her the time-honored heads of her ancestors. Her shame would be her father's, and that of all her race. Colonel Cameron was the most admired man in the community. Every one knew his principles, and she—his daughter, had covered him with mire. But not once through all the anguish of that ride did the Boss shrink from the fulfilment of her duty. She was no coward, yet she felt like a woman unutterably guilty in her own mind. The dread prophecy of the morrow shone in her death-white face.

Bob, in the darkness, could but vaguely see that the Boss was holding her head high, but with a pathetic droop of her shoulders.

“I am afraid you are tired, darling, aren't you?”

There was so much wistful insistency in his voice that the Boss turned and looked gently towards him. Then, all at once, something in his tone brought back the pathetic memory of the days when she,

Bob, and Lucius, had travelled over this same road together. Her two little hands clutched at her breast, and her small white teeth struck against each other. The very hedges rose up like wraiths of old memories on either side. There was sad significance in every mile. It seemed as if her girlhood were slipping away from her, and that she was leaving it in every winding and turning of the long country road.

There was a similarity, she thought, between the path and her life. She had started out to go straight ahead, with honor for her beacon-light. But her strength had failed ; she had wavered from side to side, and then gone down grade fast and faster, until she had lost her way in the tangled labyrinth of love.

Try as she might, she could not escape the terrible effect of an offence against her own narrow idea of right; though, in reality, her purity was unsullied. Self-accusation was at work. She had broken her word and transgressed the conventionalities of life : therefore, in the eyes of the world, she would be disgraced ; in the eyes of her father, lost.

The sky and earth seemed to press down

and hem her in. There was a sharp immediate pain in her heart. She must satisfy her conscience. She must expiate her wrong-doing. Out of the suffering she felt she realized the agony she must give.

With dry-eyed misery, came the thought of Bob—dear, old, lovable, simple Bob—trustful, unselfish Bob. She recalled the days before the poisonous delights had spoiled forever the innocent pleasure of her life, making it all stale and flat, and of her heart, a thing of thirst and longing.

She was still thinking of this when they reached a sunken fence dividing the road. The part behind was lost in the density of the moonlit maple-trees—and that ahead, stretched out like some gored serpent, slinking back to its haunt. She had not put these thoughts from her when they stopped to water their horses at the spring.

Presently the Boss began to speak, her sentences at first seemed low and broken ; after a while they rushed from her mouth and crowded fast upon one another, as if she were afraid to think between the lines.

“I want you to tell me, Bob, all you know—everything. Why are you so sure Lucius will be convicted ? Now

mind, don't keep anything back. I have a right to know all. I am no child. I should have been told at first, not put off with falsehoods. It was your duty to have kept me thoroughly informed."

"My duty?" echoed Bob vaguely. He would have added that he wished to Heaven he had never told her anything; but the only thing he did say was, "I meant it for the best."

"Go on!" said the girl, with imperious, insisting eye. "I asked you to tell me what you know. Why don't you commence? Don't be afraid;—tell me everything—mind, everything."

"There isn't much to tell," said Bob, with a sort of hopeless gasp. "The evidence was so terribly damaging, and then, Lucius' actions helped to prejudice the jury."

"What actions?"

"His refusal to answer the questions put to him."

"What questions?"

"To whom he wrote the night of the murder."

"Go on!" said the girl, breathing heavily.

"If he was alone in the cottage."

"Oh ! Oh ! Oh !" An odd, dry sound came from her throat. Bob turned his head to stare at the Boss, almost nervously. She was sitting up straight; but her shoulders shook slightly, and she was twisting the reins about in her fingers. The moonlight coming through the branches of a tree, streaked her white face. Her gray eyes were wide open.

There was a queer empty feeling in Bob's heart as he watched her.

They rode on—down a slope, through a neglected meadow, up a tall hill, over a level road. Above the minor night noises came the murmuring of a creek, densely overshadowed by flowering shrubs.

Bob turned to speak, but his horse jumped ahead, and he had to wait a moment until he steadied him.

"Boss, what is the matter, dear ? I can't quite understand you to-night." Bob's tone was well-nigh hopeless.

The Boss ignored the tone and question, though his voice had the rising inflection, and in his eyes was anxiety.

"Why do you think he refused to answer ? Ah, how deathly still everything is," she went on, irrelevantly. Bob," she said, with wary quickness, "why do

you think he was silent about the letter and who was with him in the cottage? Bob, who *could have* been with him? Who do you think? And, Bob, if there was somebody with him—somebody whom for some reason he was trying to shield—if—if—that person didn't come forward and save him, what would you think?"

"Think!" burst out Bob with excitement. "I'd think him a blackguard—a murderer, who ought to be lynched or branded for life, so that no honest person would hold fellowship with him again."

Then an awful grayish pallor spread over the Boss' face.

"You are right, Bob—but—but—suppose—we are just supposing, you know—that, to save him, that person would be deprived of his good name—his life would be ruined—the hearts of all who loved him crushed; would you still say speak?"

"Certainly! If he did not he would be a coward, and a coward is the lowest thing on God's earth. Great Heavens! It makes my blood boil to think of it!"

The Boss followed his words with sickening acuteness.

Suddenly he asked, "What do you think, Boss?"

"I have thought all along just as you do." She brought out the words vehemently. Then she flung out her arms, and let them fall with a despairing gesture.

"I should be ashamed of myself if I didn't—deathly ashamed ; for, like you, I hate cowards." As the girl spoke, the light from the moon lit up her slender figure, swaying excitedly in the saddle. "No one could be such a coward, when he knew to speak meant to save a life. But the other life—the other poor life," said she, as a sob broke from her throat.

A dead branch dipped slightly in the breeze and tapped her on the shoulder. The Boss gave an unearthly scream. Bob grasped the reins of her horse, and pulled her to a sudden halt.

"What is it?" he cried breathlessly. The girl steadied herself against the pommel of the saddle.

"Nothing—I am only nervous," she replied, the pain, fear and misery escaping from her overcharged heart. "Don't be angry—forgive me, Bob !"

She put out her hand and took his. It was full of strength and warmth. She was dizzy and trembling.

Bob watched her, his blue eyes glowing.

"You are ill, Presch ; I was a brute to let you come," he said tenderly.

"I am all right ; don't worry. I was only frightened," she answered, feebly trying to release her hand, which, after a second, she left in his. She was half-dazed.

Her excitement over, she sat up very straight, still holding fast to Bob's wrist. Thus they rode on together.

Presently she looked up at Bob. "There is nobody so good and true as you," she said with great tenderness. She put up her hand with a little inviting gesture.

Bob leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"After to-morrow you must rest, darling ; your head is so hot."

The Boss started, an incredulous horror in her face. In her mind she pictured a court-room, full of people, and her father's beautiful old head crushed upon his hands. She saw it there in front of her, on the side, everywhere.

"Daughter !" he was crying, always, "daughter ! Oh, my daughter !" Then she touched her burning head with her hand.

"Rest, after to-morrow ! Oh ! Oh ! Yes, there will be rest after to-morrow," she thought. Such a long, long rest !

CHAPTER XVI.

THE summing up of the case was over ; the jury had risen to their feet, preparatory to leaving the court-room.

In their eyes, as well as in those of the people, Lucius Strange was a murderer. His counsel's efforts, as well as his wonderful oratorical outburst, had been unavailing. It was unanimously believed that Lucius had deliberately killed Bill Owen.

Suddenly, in the midst of the silence that usually precedes the judge's charging of the jury, a messenger was seen approaching Dick Brunswick, holding a note conspicuously in his hand. For a moment the court-room suspended its breathing. Through the quiet came the rustling of stiff paper, as his quick fingers tore open the envelope. When he had read the note, he jumped to his feet, looking suddenly boyish ; then his long legs took him, with one unbroken stride, over to Irving Bulloch, who rose to receive him. For a moment

they held a whispered conversation, and seemed strangely excited to the anxious spectators. Presently, Dick Brunswick left the room. The atmosphere tingled with expectation, and a fresh buzz of excitement ran around.

Irving Bulloch faced the judge, and requested that the jury might retain their seats for a few moments longer, as some very important evidence had been handed in.

"The fact is, your honor," his pompous voice triumphant and full, "we hope to prove an alibi."

From the crowded court-room, volatile as are all multitudes, burst a wild hurrah from the whites.

As Lucius heard this he started back. A convulsive tremor ran through his form—a tremor as of one recoiling from a terrible blow. His face changed to an ashen gray, and around his mouth was a great line of anguish that stretched beneath and beyond his thick moustache.

"Oh, my God ! Oh, Christ !"

He put his hand over his eyes. There was a bursting weight of pain at the bottom of his heart. His body staggered in the chair, then jerked in a sudden spas-

modic way. In his mouth there was a taste of blood, for he had bitten his lips almost in two. He was aroused to the agony of consciousness by the loud uncompromising monosyllable of four letters, "Here." He heard a low, hoarse murmur ;—then a struggling silence—then a whisper of excitement that made the room quiver ; then a groan from an old man's suddenly withered throat.

" Daughter ! "

With a pain like that of a tooth gnawing a hole in his breast, he saw a girl in a Kahkee riding-habit, her hair in tight braids, like a close copper cap, her face as white as the dead—who, as she heard her father's voice, staggered as if she would fall, then rallied and move forward, with a reeling step like the movement of one suddenly stricken blind. She steadied herself against the side of the witness-box ; then crept along nearer, nearer, nearer, until she reached the centre of the rail. As she looked up and caught the myriad of eyes fixed upon her, she shrank back and looked wildly around, as if she were seeking some means of escape. The blood rushed furiously to her head ; her heart beat like the strokes of a hammer. Through

the din in her brain she heard Dick Brunswick's voice—a voice she knew so well, the tones expressing but feebly the horror and emotion he felt at the situation.

“Your name?”

Twice she tried to speak; twice she failed. The third time she answered, but her voice sounded so strange she thought some one had spoken for her over her shoulder.

“Mildred Lee Cameron.”

In a low, hoarse voice Dick Brunswick began his examination.

The girl glanced at Bob with intense wistfulness; then at her father; then shivered, and finally began to answer. The sentences fell from her dry lips with startling distinctness, despite their tremor and extreme rapidity of utterance. Only once had she to struggle for breath—when she looked at Lucius. For him she was giving herself up to public earthly shame. She had undertaken the sacrifice—she would do her part well.

The Colonel sat like a statue and gazed at his child, stupefied with amazement and suffering. His eyes were pent-up hell-lights.

Poor Bob's head was a whirlpool; his

body felt as limp as a sponge. He was breathing deeply.

When the Boss came to the night of the murder, she said :

“ Mr. Strange was going away. I felt he was leaving without saying good-bye. It must have been twelve o'clock, or very near it. I was just about to retire when my old nurse told me of his departure. I hurried over to his cottage at once. When I looked through the window I saw he was on his knees. He was packing, I think. When he looked up and saw me, he begged me to go away. It was all my fault—every bit of it. I refused to. I told him I had come to say good-bye, and I would not go back until I had talked to him. Why, he didn't even want to help me through the window. I came in that way, because it faced the vegetable-garden, and I was afraid they might see me from the big house if I went in by the door. It was all wrong—I know it ; but the thought of his going—of my never seeing him again—never hearing from him—never knowing if he were alive or dead : you can imagine that I forgot everything else. Always, though, he begged me to go back to the house ; but I told him I had come to

bid him good-bye, and I would not leave until I had finished what I had to say."

Then the girl shot a piteous glance at her father, and spread out her hands as if for some one to take them. After a second, she continued :

" You can readily see it was my fault—every bit of it. When he saw I was obstinate, he stopped urging, and we talked I don't know how long. It must have been hours, for the first thing I remember the clock over in the big house struck four. Then Lucius—I mean Mr. Strange—insisted upon my returning at once. After that I helped him to pack a few things, and when I left the cottage the day was just breaking. That is all," she finished gently. " I have told everything, and you quite understand, don't you? You are satisfied, aren't you, that he couldn't have committed the murder—because—because—I was with him all the time—every hour—every moment."

" And why, may I be permitted to inquire," broke in the sneering tones of the attorney for the State, " did you withhold such important evidence until the eleventh hour ? "

The Boss turned in the direction from

whence came the voice, but she looked with unseeing eyes. She had caught a glimpse of her father, pallid with the wrath of a strong man, sitting motionless in his chair. His face was rigid, and the whites of his eyes were streaked with red veins of blood. His hands twisted together, like one seeking pain in the body to eliminate pain in the mind. Within thirty minutes he had passed from hale, hearty manhood to decrepit old age. She wrung her hands in agony as a ray of intense sunlight fell across his face, and brought into prominence its haggard outlines.

“I knew nothing of how matters stood until last night. I had been kept in ignorance. Do you think I would have stayed away if I had known? No, no, no !—a thousand times no !”

That half hour of horrible publicity was a whole lifetime of torture to Lucius. Every tone of shame and despair in her voice seared into his brain ; every plea for mercy to the father that would never forgive ; the jeering laugh ; the sneering voices ! He felt as if all his being had passed out of him into hers. As she continued, and he saw the white face grow whiter, the little hands strain at the

knuckles, his throat became paralyzed with anguish, his suffering insupportable. His brave, beautiful Boss, true as steel. God ! If he could only help her ! He felt as if he should scream aloud. There was a pricking pain in his head, and his back ached as if from long leaning in the same direction.

Suddenly it was all over ; the Boss was free to go. She had given her life for Lucius ; there was nothing else to be done. She stepped out of the witness-box with a cautious tread as though she were walking along the jagged edge of some precipice.

Through the exulting uproar of the crowding, gaping multitude she crept forward with palms outstretched, as if feeling her way. As she found the knob of a door, she opened it and let herself out, closing it softly behind her.

Bob crouched in his seat and held his breath, saying over and over again :

“ What is the meaning of it ? What is the meaning of it ? ”

Then he crouched still closer, as the entire truth shot full into his heart. As the deep vibration of the last cheer rolled away like the echo of a bass-drum, he arose stiffly.

"Let me pass," he stammered, and roughly pushing aside the obstacles in his way, hurried out with stumbling step. His face was reddened with the stains of tears, as he disappeared beneath the intense brilliancy of the summer sun.

Old Mammy stood at the half-open door of her cabin. She wore a pair of carpet-slippers and a frock, the color of an old pipe. She was leaning on her broom and looking down the road, with a vague unrest in her bosom—the premonition of affection. Overhead there was a faint rustling of leaves on the tall oak trees. At her feet a toad darted by, overthrowing a great ant-hill in his path. From afar, a cow looked at her and mooed plaintively. *She* sighed deeply, then bent her head and entered the silent cabin, where a repast of cow-peas and potato-pone, sprinkled over with lilac-berries, was served upon a china-set, covered with grotesque pictorial people.

A solitary figure on horseback grew out of a speck in the roadway—a strange, pathetic droop to his shoulders; and his hands burning and fevered, as if with fire. It was something more than a man broken by age; it was the figure of a wreck—a ruin.

As he rode along, his head swayed from side to side. A low moan, the echo of a broken heart, came from between his cracked lips. The breeze had died away, and the air was quiet, but with a sullen menace in it.

“Good God ! What was that ?”

Was he losing his brain ? And yet he could not help thinking that somehow he had expected it:—he had known it would be so.

Two iron fingers seemed to be pressing his throat. With a great effort the figure of the old man slid down from his horse and stood for a moment upright ; then fell on his knees and dragged his tall length steadily through the sunburnt grass—nearer—nearer—until he reached a clearing, where a still figure, in a Kahkee riding-habit, lay flat on the ground, with her head thrown back, the wide-open eyes looking always into his—eyes fixed in the stare of sudden death. The snow-white hair lay in dank rings upon his head ; his mouth twitched convulsively.

“I knew it,” he said, with a sort of delirious exultation between the sharp pains. “It had to be—it had to come.”

Suddenly, a thousand memories over-

took him. She was a baby again, lying in her father's lap. In the front parlor of the big house she was laughing and cooing up at him, tangling her baby fingers in his fierce moustache, and holding her little foot in the other hand.

Rapid pictures etched themselves upon his brain—the day she was trying her first pony, her little white piquet riding-skirt, rumbled up, showing her two dimpled, rosy knees ; the days and nights when her throat was sore and parched, and she was given up for dead. How he sat watching, watching, wrestling with that horrible dread !

Good God ! He was choking ! Yet—it was done. He could say nothing—it had to be !

He closed the two gray staring eyes, and crossed the brown little fingers ; then feebly lifted a corner of his handkerchief and wiped the spot where the bullet had made a tiny hole not far from the broad, white temple. Then he carefully smoothed the folds of her riding-skirt and braced himself to lift her in his arms. He carried her across the lawn, where the grass was bathed with the soft brilliancy from the setting sun. Twice he stopped, and each

time it seemed to be without an object, or rather from forgetfulness of the object that had started his steps. Reaching his room he laid her down upon his own narrow bed, locking the two doors and closing tight the blinds. Father and daughter were alone. They were destined to be alone for evermore.

All night he lay across the feet of his child. His body shaken with spasms, and his arms stretched across the bed from edge to edge. He was facing his life behind and his Maker ahead.

At the first streak of half-veiled dawn, he took down his gun from the rack ; then drew a ring from his finger, and slipped it on the hand of his child. After this, he crossed them back upon her breast. For a moment he gazed down upon the slender, beautiful face of the dead, then fingered a stray lock of hair.

"It is the only thing left," he said wistfully. Suddenly he felt thirsty and drank two glasses of water, one after another ; then picked up the gun that he had laid down, glanced at the end of the barrel, and raised the hammer. It was loaded.

"It is the only thing left," the *words* only just grazed his lips. Reaching over,

with the butt of the gun on the floor, he pressed the trigger. There was a white puff of smoke, and the hissing bullet went straight to his heart. As he fell, his white hand touched his daughter's face like a benediction—then plunged downwards.

Through a broken slat in the drawn blinds a flood of golden sunlight fell caressingly upon the two still figures, as they lay side by side. But the drawn blinds kept their secret well.

FINIS.





